

THE INTERNATIONAL FILM MAGAZINE

Sight & Sound



THE FEMALE GAZE

100 OVERLOOKED FILMS DIRECTED BY WOMEN



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The brothers grim

Brian Helgeland's *Legend* reinvigorates the gangster genre with his take on the Kray twins story. By **Nick James** PLUS **David Thomson** on the genius of the film's star, Tom Hardy

REGULARS

5 **Editorial** The anxiety of influence

Rushes

- 6 **Danny Leigh** celebrates the DIY ethic of the Scalarama festival
- 8 **Object Lesson:** **Hannah McGill** plays her cards right
- 9 **The Five Key....:** director biopics
- 10 **Nick James** on the London Film Festival
- 11 **Dispatches:** **Mark Cousins** slams easy assumptions about female filmmakers

The Industry

- 14 **Development Tale:** **Charles Gant** on the rocky road to *Everest*
- 15 **The Numbers:** **Charles Gant** offers a snapshot of the Sebastião Salgado documentary *Salt of the Earth*
- 16 **Brewster:** **Ben Roberts** on growing the film industry outside London

Festivals

- 17 **Neil Young** enjoys the rejuvenating effects of the Swiss town of Locarno

Wide Angle

- 58 **Thirza Wakefield** laments the strange neglect of the films of Marguerite Duras
- 60 **Soundings:** **Nick Pinkerton** on a classic triptych of LA's post-punk scene
- 61 **Primal Screen:** **Pamela Hutchinson** describes how 20s Hollywood got in touch with its feminine side
- 62 **John Beagles** reports from this year's Venice Biennale

Letters

Endings

- 120 **Andrew Bienen**, screenwriter of *Boys Don't Cry*, on Joshua Logan's *Picnic*

FEATURES

18

COVER FEATURE

The female gaze: 100 overlooked films directed by women

Over 20 pages we celebrate a selection of remarkable works by female filmmakers that have unjustly slipped from public view – with choices by Jane Campion, Greta Gerwig, Claire Denis and Agnès Varda among others. Introduction by **Isabel Stevens** PLUS **Ruth Lingford** examines the history of female directors in animation and **Virginie Séavy** looks at the bloody-minded women directing horror films

46

A death in the family

A self-absorbed filmmaker has to come to terms with the impending death of her aged mother in *Mia madre*, a fine return to form for director Nanni Moretti. By **Geoff Andrew**

48

The ghost road

With *Horse Money*, Pedro Costa offers a complex meditation on history and memory, colonisation and revolution, and the plight of society's poor and dispossessed. By **Jacques Rancière**

54

Another place, another time

Seven years after her last film, *The Headless Woman*, Lucrecia Martel is back at work on another chronicle of existential uncertainty with an adaptation of *Zama*, a classic Argentinian novel about a civil servant in late 18th-century Paraguay waiting for his life to change. **Diego Lerer** visits the set



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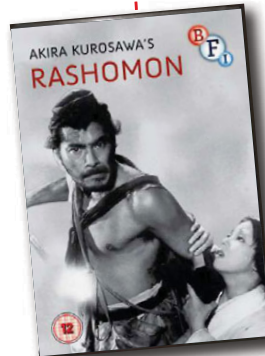
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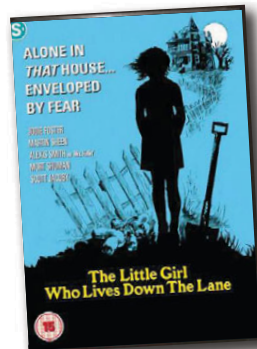
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COVER

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NEXT ISSUE

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Contents Reviews

FILMS OF THE MONTH

66 *Irrational Man*68 *Macbeth*70 *Miss Julie*72 *Pasolini*

FILMS

74 *Absolutely Anything*74 *Alive Inside*75 *American Ultra*76 *The Bad Education Movie*76 *Brothers*77 *Containment*77 *The Dance of Reality*78 *Death of a Gentleman*79 *En équilibre*80 *Escobar: Paradise Lost*80 *La Famille Bélier*81 *Fantastic Four*82 *The Gift*82 *A Girl at My Door*83 *Horse Money*84 *How to Change the World*85 *Infini*85 *Just Jim*86 *Legend*87 *The Man from U.N.C.L.E.*87 *Marc Quinn: Making Waves*88 *The Messenger*89 *Mia madre*90 *Misery Loves Comedy*90 *Mission: Impossible –**Rogue Nation*91 *99 Homes*92 *Orion: The Man Who**Would Be King*93 *Pixels*93 *Pleasure Island*94 *The Pyramid Texts*95 *Ricki and the Flash*95 *Straight Outta Compton*96 *A Syrian Love Story*97 *Tangerines*98 *3 1/2 Minutes*98 *Vacation*99 *A Walk in the Woods*99 *The World of*
*Astley Baker Davies*100 *Zombie Fight Club*

HOME CINEMA

103 *The Adventures of Gerard*,
Films starring Richard
Attenborough, *Cruel Story*
of Youth, *Here Is Your*
Life, *The Maggie*, *Pickup*
on South Street, *Run of*
the Arrow, *The Town*
that Dreaded Sundown,
Variété, *Vivre sa vie*
DVD features102 **Tony Rayns** on the
anguished poetry of
Franju's *Eyes Without a Face*105 **David Mackenzie** explains
why the colour's all
wrong on your TV set106 **Michael Brooke** relishes
the eccentric auteurism of
Richard Massingham110 **Lost and Found: Alex**
Davidson revisits 70s
comedy *Girl Stroke Boy*
Television108 *Baretta*, *Wolcott*

BOOKS

112 **Robert Hanks** on the
complicated life and
times of Auntie Beeb113 **Bryony Dixon** swoons over
the colours of early cinema114 **Pamela Hutchinson**
admires an acute study of
*The Birth of a Nation*114 **Henry K. Miller** is
fascinated by a history of
Regent Street Cinema

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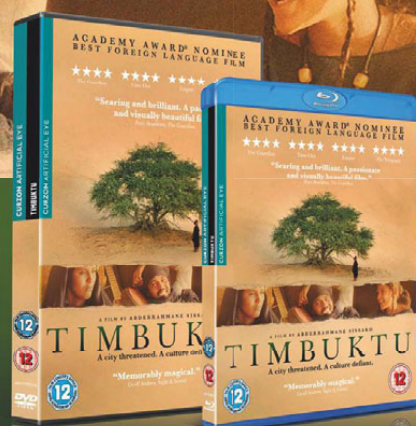
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Editorial Nick James



THE ANXIETY OF INFLUENCE

I'm just back from my summer holiday, which, as you might expect, involves me trying not to think about film for a couple of weeks. Before that welcome break, however, I was thinking quite intensively about a couple of male auteurs, big beasts if you like, of the cinephile forest. One was Michael Haneke, about whom I wrote an essay for a forthcoming DVD release of *Code Unknown*; the other, Andrei Tarkovsky, whose entire works are being shown at the BFI Southbank in London in October and November, alongside 12 films I've programmed by directors who were influenced by Tarkovsky.

Rewatching *Code Unknown* was a revelation in that it seemed even more pertinent to the current European crises concerning asylum seekers, refugees and the general status of EU citizens, than it was in 2000 when it was made. And thinking about Haneke's work in general – all the way back to his TV films of the 1970s – makes one all the more admiring of his political effectiveness, achieved through the absolute rigour of his modernist anti-narrative practices. By contrast, contemplating Tarkovsky's films is an altogether dreamier, more poetic affair in which (in my case) one's lack of belief in God is repeatedly tested by their awe-inspiring faith, conviction, scope and imaginative brilliance.

Despite these vast differences between the two directors, I came to realise – too late, alas, for the programme – that *Code Unknown* begins with a scene that might be a tribute of sorts to the one that opens Tarkovsky's *Mirror*. A girl at a special school is playing a game of charades, enacting a scene of fear, but her classmates aren't getting what she's trying to say. It's a straightforward visual key into the film's main concern: how our inability to communicate makes us afraid and how our fear then redoubles our reticence. The teenage boy shown on TV during the opening of *Mirror* has a different problem: he stammers and the psychologist examining him puts him under hypnosis. She commands him to say, "I can speak" and he does so, clearly.

Who gets permission to communicate is the issue at the heart of our cover story this month – the 100 overlooked or underappreciated films directed by women. One of the benefits of not having thought about film for a while is that you refresh your perspective, and I was immediately struck by one aspect of my Tarkovsky

While Denis and Martel are among my favourite active filmmakers, I've never tried to think through the entire works of either of them in the way I have with Haneke and Tarkovsky



programme. Of the 12 films I've chosen as influenced by Tarkovsky, two are directed by women: Claire Denis's *The Intruder* and Lucrecia Martel's *The Headless Woman* (you can read our report from the set of Martel's latest film, *Zama*, on page 54). *The Headless Woman's* inclusion is, frankly, a bit of a stretch and you'll have to wait until my article on Tarkovsky next month to hear my rationale for its inclusion. Claire Denis's use of time in *The Intruder* is what I'll focus on in the same essay.

But while Denis and Martel are among my favourite active filmmakers, I realise that I've never properly tried to think through the entire works of either of them in the way I have with Haneke and Tarkovsky. I could glibly say, well, they're both character-centred portraitists, but then Denis's *The Intruder* demands attention for being just as prescient about the current situation of asylum seekers in Europe as *Code Unknown*. Tarkovsky made seven features, Denis has made a dozen. Can you imagine a programme curated to underscore the influence of Denis on ten films directed by men? I'd like to think we could, but (correct me if I'm wrong) I don't think anybody has yet done so. Is then the 'anxiety of influence', as described by the literary critic Harold Bloom, a male-only game – that of consciously trying to follow and outdo your forebears? I think it is and I think it plays into the reasons why we follow the false consciousness Mark Cousins describes on page 11, which allows us sometimes to forget that female filmmakers are always there and have always been there. It's a vital aim of this issue, therefore, to offer a selection that will influence cinema in general, not just other female filmmakers.

We plumped for a convenient list of 100 films made by women, but it's already proved to be insufficient. Clio Barnard wanted to write about Carine Adler's *Under the Skin* (1997) but, due to other urgent priorities, just missed the deadline; we cut my praising of Liv Ullmann's brilliant infidelity drama *Faithless* (2000) to make room for an unmissable late entry on the basis that we already have a piece about Ullmann's new film *Miss Julie* in the magazine this month. This 100, then, is itself only a prelude to much more to come.

IN THE FRAME

VARIETY PARADE



Independent spirit: a poster from the old Scala cinema in Kings Cross

Almost a quarter of a century after London's much-loved Scala cinema closed, its spirit lives on in the Scalarama festival

By Danny Leigh

Did it feel like the end of the world, the closure of the Scala in June 1993? Of course it did, as London lost its peeling fairytale palace of cult film; but for all the sadness among those of us who frequented it, no protesters thronged Kings Cross, and after a while our rage turned to shrugs. I think we thought there would be another one along in a minute. More fool us.

But now it lives on, kind of. What began in 2011 as the wistful one-off retrospective Scala Forever has bloomed into Scalarama, an annual national festival of the new rep cinema in all its gaudy wonder. The name survives, but the spirit?

Well, pinning down what the spirit actually was is a headache. The Scala is like punk, with which it shared a timeframe and sensibility – something else that never means quite the same to two consecutive people, often simplest to describe as what it wasn't. The Scala was too scabby to be arthouse, and more than a bolthole for gore. Neither was it any kind of cinephile oasis: the programme was great but the prints were weary, the sound drowned out by the Northern Line, audience behaviour some way from ecclesiastical reverence, as the cleaners knew. As a late-night venue where rackety tunes boomed out between films, it had more in common with a drinking club than with the NFT as was. A difficult old beast, then, to drag into the present.

But in meaningful ways, you can see its shape behind the new festival. The beauty of the Scala was its ecology, the loose consortium of misfits that haunted it. There, sometimes literally, it felt like no one was in charge, and the same sense of free-for-all informs Scalarama, which allows anyone to host their own events under the festival banner (in 2015, this is called 'open source').

For all the hedonism, there was always a political streak in the Scala, a movie house that sprang out of the radical Other Cinema and was a beacon in the long night of Thatcherism (in fact, with Section 28 as the backdrop, there's an argument to be made that much of the

ON OUR RADAR

Terry Gilliam

The Bible, 'Mad' magazine, Grimm's fairytales and the films of Powell and Pressburger are some of the influences that have fed Terry Gilliam's imagination, and which the director (right) will explore in a multimedia discussion at the Southbank Centre, London, on 7 October.



Tangerine

Sean Baker's rowdy film (right), a low-budget comedy about two transgender prostitutes searching for a cheating boyfriend in Los Angeles, is the first feature to be shot on an iPhone. After being heralded at Sundance and becoming an indie breakout hit in the US over the summer, it will reach UK cinemas in November.





The dream endures: Apichatpong Weerasethakul's *Tropical Malady* (2004)

hedonism was political). Now, that streak finds its rhyme in a programme with a strong feminist voice. The Directed By Women strand includes a cluster of films from the wildly underseen New York iconoclast Shirley Clarke, while programmers like Bechdel Test Fest and Reel Equality have a leading role in proceedings. And the ghost of punk wafts by once more with a Nottingham screening of Penelope Spheeris's *The Decline of Western Civilization* (see page 60).

Back in Kings Cross, another signature of the Scala was the mad diversity of its programme: it was where *Salò* met *The Man with Two Brains*, and Tarkovsky clattered into Herschell Gordon Lewis (the first time I turned up, I was 16 and there to see the Marx brothers). Happily, the same promiscuity endures, now as then kicking at the wall between high and low art: the Japanese phantasmagoria *Hausu* screens in Glasgow, there's Jean Vigo in Rochester, *Westworld* in Leeds, Apichatpong Weerasethakul's *Tropical Malady* in Liverpool (the distributor Second Run has titles scattered throughout, and a tenth anniversary celebration at the ICA with filmmakers such as Pedro Costa and Yorgos Lanthimos introducing selections from their

catalogue). There are favourites from the old place (*Repo Man*, John Waters) and recent films like *Dogtooth* that would have fitted in perfectly. In Bristol, programmer Tara Judah has a triple bill of Nicolas Cage movies that sadly, but rather brilliantly, clashes with Bristol Silents' 'Oddities of Soviet Cinema' a mile away.

Then, we had one hulking fleapit in Kings Cross. Now, the films have spread across the country, and into all manner of strange venues. Some of the legwork of Scalarama is being provided by Cinema For All, the longtime guardians of grassroots community cinema; amid the programme's splashier moments are screenings like that of Margarethe von Trotta's *Hannah Arendt* at Ayrshire's Dunlop Village Hall. Forgive me flogging the analogy, but if the Scala was the Sex Pistols, Scalarama may be the post-punk DIY explosion that came after. Where countless obscure bands would stuff 7" singles into handmade sleeves, now film collectives are hosting free screenings with a single communally owned video projector. Sitting at home with Netflix has rarely sounded sillier. 

 **Scalarama runs 1-30 September, around the UK. scalarama-2015.screeningfilm.com**

The Jacques Rivette Collection

Notoriously hard to see in its full-length version, the French New Wave director's 12-hour opus 'Out 1' (right), made in 1971, is finally to be released on DVD and Blu-ray on 30 November by Arrow Films. The restored, limited edition will be accompanied by three of Rivette's little-seen features and a host of extras.



Hou Hsiao-Hsien

Before the release of his mesmerising wuxia tale 'The Assassin' later this year, catch up on the Taiwanese master's past films (woefully underserved on DVD in the UK) with this full retrospective at BFI Southbank, London until 6 October. Hou (right) will be the subject of a number of talks, as well as Olivier Assayas's 1997 portrait of the director, also screening; and, in the highlight of the season, he will be discussing his career with Tony Rayns on 14 September.



LISTOMANIA HIP-HOP FILMS

F. Gary Gray's N.W.A. biopic *Straight Outta Compton* is the latest in a long line of films to tune in to the irrepressible world of hip-hop

- 1 **Wild Style** (1982)
Charlie Ahearn
- 2 **Beat Street** (1984)
Stan Lathan
- 3 **Breakin'** (1984)
Joel Silberg
- 4 **Krush Groove** (1985)
Michael Schultz
- 5 **Juice** (1992)
Ernest Dickerson
- 6 **CB4** (1993)
Tamra Davis
- 7 **Fear of a Black Hat** (1994)
Rusty Cundieff
- 8 **Slam** (1998)
Marc Levin
- 9 **8 Mile** (2002)
Curtis Hanson
- 10 **Hustle & Flow** (2005)
Craig Brewer



QUOTE OF THE MONTH SHIRLEY CLARKE

"All the movie moguls claimed to be astounded by the reality of my films. How did I do it? And I'd say, 'Well, it wasn't hard to make Harlem look like Harlem'"



CARD TRICKS

Even in the digital age, the business card clings on – often less a proof of identity than a hint that something needs proving



By Hannah McGill

A business card is a charmingly unstable proof of identity, when you think about it – “I am this person! I have an office! It must be true because I got it printed on a card!” – and only seems more so in an age in which most of our information about other people is sourced and authenticated online. And yet technology has lagged in terms of replacing the physical business card with an instantaneous digital

means of logging or using someone’s contact details, like the phonecard Ellen Ripley uses to contact (and disconnect) Carter Burke in *Aliens* (1986). The business card clings to life, while seeming an anomaly. Cinema acknowledges its frailty as a marker of identity: the “let me give you my card” moment frequently provides an opportunity to emphasise whatever is uncertain, untrustworthy or preposterous in a character’s self-presentation. Possession of a business card by an adolescent is a signal of nerdy precocity in *Rushmore* (1998) and *Mean Girls* (2004); while in *Hello, Dolly!* (1969) the protagonist’s self-serving flexibility is established via the variety of expertises claimed on her sheaf of different cards; and the benign madness of Elwood P. Dowd in *Harvey* (1950) is displayed via his indiscriminate dissemination of his card.

In the world occupied by *American Psycho*’s banker-cum-murderer/fantastist Patrick Bateman,

identity and status have merged to such an extent that the business card itself is a fetish object. On handing it out, its owner submits to being assessed not on what its text communicates about him, but on his taste in stationery. Initially cocky about his new card (which is coloured an appropriately corporeal bone), Patrick is gradually outclassed by his peers, while his inner voice seethes its resentment: “Look at that subtle off-white colouring. The tasteful thickness of it. Oh, my God – it even has a watermark.”

Little could these conspicuously consumerist 80s powerbrokers – or even many of those who saw *American Psycho* on its release in 2000 – have predicted that the most enviable contacts in the coming generation of tycoons would be drawn from a geek subculture unlikely to be impressed by designer suits or gym memberships, let alone the cut of a card. In *The Social Network* (2010), the trappings of wealth and power are as much



Cards sharp: as seen in (top row) *American Psycho*, (middle row) *Fight Club* and *The Social Network*, (bottom row) *Mean Girls* and *Rushmore*

a joke as a reality to Facebook founder Mark Zuckerberg: he amasses his vast fortune clad in T-shirt and sneakers, and his business card reads, "I'm CEO, Bitch." The wording, unlike some of the film's other detail, is an undisputed lift from Zuckerberg's real life: according to his early colleague Andrew Bosworth, "It was intended as a joke for his friends, and speaks to how unclear it was even in his own mind at the time that he would someday become such an important (and scrutinised) leader in our industry." The film sees the irony rapidly drain out of Zuckerberg's faux-machismo when his 'Bitch' cards are delivered to him just as his friendship with erstwhile collaborator Eduardo Saverin reaches a decisive end. He is CEO, and many people, whether he likes it or not, are now his bitch.

Always compelled by status games and morphing identities, David Fincher has used business cards elsewhere. The adventures

Look at that subtle off-white colouring. The tasteful thickness of it. Oh, my God – it even has a watermark

of Nicholas Van Orton in *The Game* (1997) commence when he receives a card from the mysterious Consumer Recreational Services; and Tyler Durden in *Fight Club* (1999) introduces himself via one that advertises his Paper Street Soap Company, through which he sells soap made from human fat reclaimed from liposuction clinics.

The nihilistic/moralistic mischief-makers of *Fight Club* might revile or admire the antics of Paul Newman's ambulance-chasing lawyer in *The Verdict* (1982), who courts business by handing out his card to mourners at funerals; or of the eponymous bank robber in *Charley Varrick* (1973), whose card reads, 'Last of the independents' – but they certainly share a sensibility with the Joker of *The Dark Knight* (2008), who simply uses the joker from a deck of playing cards.

Business cards provide a whimsical link between realms in *Oh, God!* (1977) and *Bruce Almighty* (2003), in both of which God hands one out; in *Bedazzled* (1967) ("I'm the Horned One. The Devil. Let me give you my card"); and in *Night of the Demon* (1957), in which sinister wording appears and disappears on the card of cult leader Julian Karswell.

Perhaps the film industry's punishing preoccupation with networking, and the frequent misrepresentations of identities and opportunities that results, accounts for some of the snider references to business cards on film. Anyone who has done business at a film festival is familiar with the process of sorting through a mass of cards thereafter – I used to have a colleague who aided me by writing the word 'NUTTER' on those she deemed unpromising from the off. A close-up of a business card also has a beautifully quotidian purpose, however, as Fincher himself has pointed out. Not sure how to drive home who an important character is? "If in doubt, hold on to the business card, so the audience can really read the guy's name." 📇

THE FIVE KEY...

DIRECTOR BIOPICS

With *Pasolini*, Abel Ferrara joins a burgeoning tradition of directors celebrating the lives and work of fellow filmmakers

By Michael Brooke

Abel Ferrara's *Pasolini*, with Willem Dafoe a dead ringer for the murdered Italian auteur, is the latest entry in the small but steadily growing corpus of director biopics. Perhaps appropriately, given their own genius for self-publicity (and self-mythologising), Alfred Hitchcock and Orson Welles have undergone the treatment more than once, and Chaplin, Jean Vigo (*Vigo: Passion for Life*), James Whale (*Gods and Monsters*), a lightly fictionalised John Huston (*White Hunter, Black Heart*) and a heavily reimagined FW. Murnau (*Shadow of the Vampire*) also fuelled memorable films. Significantly, many of these movies have been deeply personal projects for their makers, including the five chosen here.



1 8½ (1963)

Guido Anselmi (Marcello Mastroianni) never actually existed, but everyone knew at the time who he really was, and Federico Fellini's masterpiece remains the defining example of the director autobiopic, as Guido suffers a crisis of creative confidence in the face of both real-life personal dramas and the constant encroachment of his dreams, as both distraction and fuel for his imagination.



2 Jacquot de Nantes (1991)

Few cinematic love letters are quite as personal as Agnès Varda's tribute to her then dying husband Jacques Demy (1931-90), director of *The Umbrellas of Cherbourg*. The film recreates the world of his childhood, his battle with his sceptical father about his chosen profession, and his earliest film experiments in 9.5mm, resorting to stop-motion animation as an affordable way of telling stories on screen.



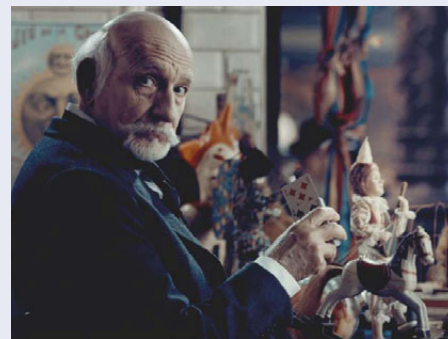
4 Baadasssss! (2003)

The story of Melvin Van Peebles (1932-) and his emergence as the first truly uncompromising African-American director via *Sweet Sweetback's Baadasssss Song* (1971) is given an extra jolt of authenticity from having him played by his son Mario – who also directs, and proves refreshingly disinclined to hide the warts. It's riotously entertaining, culturally fascinating and often distinctly sobering.



3 Ed Wood (1994)

Tim Burton's affectionate biopic of Edward D. Wood, Jr (1924-78) gratifyingly eschews the usual point-and-laugh approach to Wood criticism. Instead, the film posits that the creator of *Glen or Glenda*, *Bride of the Monster* and *Plan 9 from Outer Space* was an idiosyncratic visionary like Burton himself – or like Orson Welles, who Wood (Johnny Depp) encounters in a brief but unforgettable meeting of minds.



5 Hugo (2011)

Martin Scorsese's heartfelt tribute to Georges Méliès (1861-1938) is heavily fictionalised, not to say downright fantastical – but would Méliès himself (played in the film by Ben Kingsley) have had it any other way? Indeed, the only scenes here that nudge documentary realism are set in Méliès's own studio, as we see him concocting wild visions out of raw materials familiar to any theatre impresario.

THE BFI LONDON FILM FESTIVAL

Huge variety is always on offer at the LFF but this year looks potentially more bountiful and audience-friendly than ever

By Nick James

Bookended by British directors' works – *Suffragette*, Sarah Gavron's moving tribute to the sacrifices of the ordinary women campaigning for the vote, and *Steve Jobs*, Danny Boyle's biopic of the Apple boss – this year's LFF (7-18 October) left us with a conundrum over what to recommend. For instance, how could we leave out Christopher Nolan's short film about the Quay brothers, *Quay*, or Apichatpong Weerasethakul's *Cemetery of Splendour*, or Walter Salles's doc about Jia Zhangke, or the restoration of Ousmane Sembène's seminal *Black Girl* (1966) or our own Mark Cousins's *I Am Belfast*? The truth is we had to, because our choices below are our unmissable dozen culled from a programme that has more mysteries for us than usual, which only makes it more exciting. One film we can wholeheartedly recommend is Guy Maddin's *The Forbidden Room*, which will screen as the *Sight & Sound* Gala at the BFI IMAX on Friday 9 October. Get booking. [See bfi.org.uk/sightandsound](https://www.bfi.org.uk/sightandsound) for further recommendations and festival coverage

i See [bfi.org.uk/sightandsound](https://www.bfi.org.uk/sightandsound) for further recommendations and festival coverage



S&S GALA SCREENING

The Forbidden Room Who could resist Guy Maddin's massaging of mysteries from the deep pores of sweaty submarines and the deeper caves of vulpine violators? Not us. Come and immerse yourselves

S&S RECOMMENDS



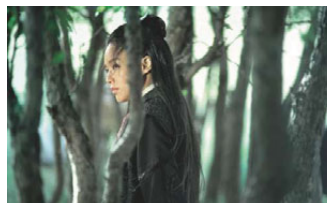
Aferim!

A delightful quasi-historical drama-cum-western, which won Radu Jude Best Director at Berlin.



Arabian Nights

Wildly ambitious in its scope, Miguel Gomes's epic adaptation deserves to be seen in its entirety.



The Assassin

Hou Hsiao-Hsien was a worthy winner of Cannes's Best Director prize for his sumptuous *wuxia* epic.



The Brand New Testament

An inventive satire in which the daughter of a malicious God seeks to unruin the world he created.



Carol

Rooney Mara and Cate Blanchett excel in Todd Haynes's exquisite Patricia Highsmith adaptation.



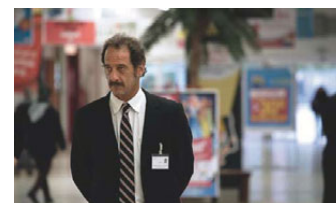
The Club

Pablo Larraín's gritty film exposes us to the iniquities of organised religion and Chilean politics.



Hitchcock/Truffaut

Kent Jones has made an evocative documentary about Truffaut's famous interviews with Hitch.



The Measure of a Man

Stéphane Brizé's film about a supermarket security guard is a spot-on satire of global market capitalism.



My Golden Days

Mathieu Amalric is an academic looking back on his formative years in Arnaud Desplechin's fine film.



A Poem Is a Naked Person

Les Blank's portrait of musician Leon Russell was completed in 1974, but has been unseen until now.



The Pearl Button

Patricio Guzmán's elegant history of the seagoing population of the islands of Southern Patagonia.



Son of Saul

László Nemes's brutal film about a Hungarian Jew forced to help the Nazis avoids all the usual clichés.

ASSUMING THAT THEY'RE THERE



Yes, women get pushed to the margins of the film business – but there are great women filmmakers out there, and always have been



By Mark Cousins

This is a story about getting lost. It veers in a way that seems logical, yet ends up in the wrong place.

It starts with Meryl Streep, Helen Mirren, *Sight & Sound*, me and (I'm assuming) you. All five of us, and lots of others, believe that it's bad that so few women are getting to direct films. We all admire Jane Campion, Kathryn Bigelow, Claire Denis, Lynne Ramsay and many of the other female directors who do make films, but know that gender equality is far from being achieved in film directing. The five of us know why that is. Men select content. Movies are a money game, and the money men favour men, etc. We're angry at this sequestering. Politically, we argue that the result has been a historic loss of voice, a perspective deficit.

So far so uncontentious. Then add into the story our cautiously hopeful assumption that – with Meryl and Helen on our side, and with the growing feeling that men dominating film directing is unacceptable – we might be getting somewhere. The more persistently and inventively we push, the greater the chance that we'll get the numbers up. Again, this is hard to disagree with.

But here's the veer: call 'there aren't enough great female directors' proposition A, and 'if we push we can win the argument and get more

of them' proposition B and we sort of infer a third proposition, C, that movie history hasn't had many great female directors. This is untrue. There are lots of them, but our anger at the fact that there aren't more today (A), and our determination to do something about that (B) leads us, politically, into a false consciousness whereby, accepting that the patriarchy is strong and self-interested, we conclude that its instinct to exclude has been very successful (C). It hasn't.

C is what I call the 'assuming that they're not there' position. Take Africa, for example. Many movie lovers might assume that, because they haven't heard of African female directors from the past, women directing film in Africa is something new. It's not. Yes, let's argue A and B about Africa, but let's not then veer into C. If we do, we forget about great directors like Safi Faye, Moufida Tlatli, Sarah Maldoror and Assia Djebar. I talk often about these filmmakers and notice that when I do, people, if they haven't heard their names, seldom write them down. Why not? Because they don't know how to spell them? Or because they assume that they are very minor figures, that I am scraping the bottom of the barrel? Or is it that the subtly negative effect of C, combined with our proper present political point (A), is to downgrade the heritage of female directors, or assume that they aren't there?

Assuming that it's there is an empowering, enlightenment project. Marie Curie assumed that radium was there. She saw it in her head before

*Female directors today
don't need to feel solitude.
They can ask, 'How would
Forough Farrokhzad do it?'*

she saw it in her test tube. We can borrow this scientific approach, or its converse, which is to try to invalidate the proposition that 'there are no great female African filmmakers from the 1960s, 1970s and 1980s'. If we can't invalidate that, if we can't show that C is rubbish, then maybe it's true.

Luckily, there are lots of people – researchers, curators, festivals, publications – who, now and for many years, have been naming and celebrating the great female directors from the past. Some people are wary of the conservative implications of the word 'heritage', but in this case I'm not. Yes, let's get angry about how few women get to direct films, but let's know the heritage. Let's make sure that Kira Muratova, Rakhshan Bani-Etemad, Lois Weber and Helma Sanders-Brahms are part of the conversation we have when we talk about this. Young directors should be taught about Pirjo Honkasalo and Larisa Shepitko, like they're taught about Richard Leacock and Tarkovsky. When I say that rejecting prop C is empowering, I mean that it gives us a sense that we are standing on strong foundations, or sturdy shoulders. I mean that female directors today don't need to feel solitude. They can ask, "How would Forough Farrokhzad do it?" "How would Elaine May do it?" "How would Esfir Shub do it?" "How would Suzanne Osten do it?" "How would Carol Morley do it?"

To ask these questions is to feel unstuck. To ask these questions is to build upon foundations. To ask these questions is to move beyond anger. Despite being born out of calls to action, prop C is a passive place. It's incurious too. I say again that I'm describing only a tendency here, and that there are great people who have written the history of female film directors, but prop C draws a veil over that history, and suggests that there's not much behind the veil.

Let's rip it away. Let's assume they're there.

DEVELOPMENT TALE

EVEREST



Mountain tension: Jason Clarke as expedition guide Rob Hall

The producers of a true-life epic about the deadly ice storm of 1996 had some miniature mountains of their own to climb

By Charles Gant

In late spring 2004, director Stephen Daldry and producer Jon Finn spent a month on the slopes of Everest, shooting background footage and gaining experience in anticipation of principal photography for a feature film backed by Working Title. Telling the story of the tragic events of 10 May 1996, when eight mountaineers died on or near the summit in a brutal ice storm, *Everest* was written by Lem Dobbs (*The Limey*), and based on several published sources, including *Left for Dead* by Beck Weathers, a survivor.

More than a decade later, *Everest* arrives in cinemas, directed by Iceland's Baltasar Kormákur, with a screenplay by William Nicholson and Simon Beaufoy, and with Finn not among the six credited producers. Although Kormákur's picture does feature some of Daldry's footage – the only parts of *Everest* actually shot on film – the only constant in this long journey is Working Title, and especially co-chair Tim Bevan, who got the passion to tell this tale in the early 2000s, after reading Jon Krakauer's *Into Thin Air*. "It's a proper saga," Bevan says regarding the film's eventful development journey.

From the outset, rights to *Into Thin Air* were

not available – the book had been made into a 1997 ABC TV movie. But it turned out that Working Title's parent company Universal was already pursuing the story, and had acquired rights to *Left for Dead*, as well as transcripts of satellite phone conversations between Everest expedition guide Rob Hall and his wife Jan. Bevan also contacted David Breashears, who at the time of the disaster was filming the IMAX documentary *Everest* lower down the slopes, and who helped rescue the survivors.

While Daldry, Finn and Breashears grabbed their footage in April 2004 – in the brief, pre-monsoon window when the summit is achievable – Working Title struggled to convince its paymasters. "Universal's attitude was neutral at best," says Bevan. "They were not convinced. It wasn't going to be a cheap film to make. Does anybody want to see it? Adventure films are old-fashioned. Wouldn't it be better to make one up? All those sort of things. Not aggressively anti, but definitely not over-encouraging. But they were keen on Stephen, so you thought, maybe we can parlay this into something."

The film did not proceed, though, and Daldry drifted off to other projects. The project lay dormant until, coming up to the tenth anniversary of the disaster, Universal and Working Title co-financed Breashears to interview survivors and spouses of the victims. This was ostensibly for the 2007 documentary *Remnants of Everest: The 1996 Tragedy*, but Bevan was really interested in the full interviews, as vital research.

Now it was time to look at the script anew,

and *Gladiator* scribe Nicholson, then inside the Working Title tent as co-writer of 2007's *Elizabeth: The Golden Age*, was commissioned to try. A concern about the Dobbs version had been that it was too multi-stranded ("It was slightly disappearing under a weight of research, and it hadn't found its dramatic structure," Bevan says); Nicholson created more of a hierarchy of characters, focusing on Hall and Weathers: "The guy who led everybody and doesn't make it, and the client who shouldn't make it but does, and is left for dead twice." Bevan adds: "You have to give the audience, who bring that experience of fiction to what they know is a fact-based story, they want to know: who am I backing, who am I getting behind?"

Next, the film pivoted to Working Title's Los Angeles office, run by Liza Chasin. There, senior development executive Evan Hayes championed the film. Kormákur was making *Contraband*, a US remake of the 2008 Icelandic feature *Reykjavík-Rotterdam*, with Working Title; Hayes turned him on to the material. *Everest*'s place on the company's priority list might be judged from the fact that Justin Isbell, who was working in reception at the LA office, was given a crack at the script. "Bill's draft was structurally very

Taking the actors up to Everest Base Camp, putting them in the freezing cold, they didn't have to act, they just had to react

sound but a little bit dry in terms of character,” Bevan says. “We wanted to put a little flesh on the bone in terms of emotional beats, making the characters a little more rounded, which is very difficult in a multi-stranded fact-based movie.”

Universal wasn’t prepared to fully finance the film, although the international division – led by David Kosse, who now runs Film4 – agreed to pre-buy all foreign rights, cash on delivery. For potential equity financing partners, and for Universal, casting was key. “I always wanted it to be an ensemble,” says Bevan. “Because I knew that if you’ve got too big a gorilla in any one of the parts, the story would collapse. It would be, what’s Tom Cruise doing up a mountain? The shot that we had with this movie was to make it feel as real as possible. As soon as you chuck a big, big movie star in it, then it becomes a lot more difficult to pull off.”

One potential problem was the fact that Hall’s clients had each paid \$70,000 to be taken to the summit. “We have to get over the whole hubris problem,” Bevan says. “A thing with the script that kept coming up was: ‘Why should I feel sorry for these people? What are they doing up there?’” The solution – “Just make them nice regular people that you believe in” – was partly in the casting, with Jason Clarke (*Zero Dark Thirty*), Josh Brolin and John Hawkes, none of them overpoweringly big stars, in key roles. Jake Gyllenhaal, the highest-profile name in the cast, was chosen to play cocky, charismatic rival team leader Scott Fischer, whose group is summiting on the same day as Hall’s.

While Working Title was talking to financiers, it turned to Simon Beaufoy (*Slumdog Millionaire*) to push the screenplay across the finishing line. “A lot of exposition had to go on with this movie,” says Bevan. “You had to put it in people’s mouths without the audience thinking, ‘Oh, I’m being preached to.’ Simon was really excellent at stitching all of that into the material.”

While the long gestation period had delivered stresses (“Working Title had its arse hanging out on this film in a big way,” says Bevan. “We’d spent a lot on development and we’d stuck our necks out more than we should have done, by a long shot”), an upside was the progress in digital technology, which vastly expanded the parameters for a disaster story unfolding on the summit of Everest.

“The visual experience in 2015, compared with what we’d have been able to give an audience in the early 2000s, is night and day,” says Bevan. Even the actual filming was a lot easier, with lighter cameras, and no problems with celluloid snapping in the cold. “The issue for us was keeping batteries warm. But taking the actors up to Everest Base Camp, putting them in the freezing fucking cold, they didn’t have to act, they just had to react – it all gives you that visceral experience.”

The delay was also helpful to concentrate financiers’ minds on the potential of an Everest film executed with 3D projection in mind. “Luckily *Gravity* had just come out,” says Bevan. “You know how you are grabbing whatever you can to propel the thing into existence. So it was: this will do for mountains what *Gravity* did for space.”

i Everest opens on 18 September and will be reviewed in our next issue

THE NUMBERS THE SALT OF THE EARTH

By Charles Gant

Cannes and Curzon Artificial Eye have always been happy bedfellows, and the 2014 edition proved no exception: the assorted strands provided the distributor with many of its notable releases in the past year, including *Leviathan*, *Timbuktu*, *Clouds of Sils Maria*, *Wild Tales*, *Queen and Country*, *Force Majeure* and *Two Days, One Night*. Bringing up the rear, in terms of release into UK cinemas, is *The Salt of the Earth*, the documentary about the Brazilian photographer Sebastião Salgado co-directed by Wim Wenders.

Jon Rushton, Curzon’s head of distribution, concedes that “we had that internal wrangle” before plumping for a July 2015 release date, setting aside qualms about the long wait after the film’s Cannes premiere in May 2014. Crucially, Curzon believed that the film needed a position in the calendar where it had the best chance of holding its screens long enough for word to circulate.

“We realised that perhaps people don’t run out for these films,” Rushton says, “and knew we needed a date where we could get two weeks without something coming in on the second week, and we found that date in July.” One encouraging precedent was *Finding Vivian Maier*, released by rival Soda in July 2014. Despite a fairly modest box-office debut of £30,400 from 25 cinemas, the photography documentary went on to achieve a healthy lifetime tally of £239,000.

The Salt of the Earth opened against Alice Rohrwacher’s *The Wonders* and Oliver Hirschbiegel’s *13 Minutes*, achieving an OK £36,900 from 26 venues on its debut, plus previews. A week later it faced Mia Hansen-Løve’s *Eden* and the Gore Vidal-William F. Buckley documentary *Best of Enemies*, increasing takings at several sites, including Curzon’s own Bloomsbury, Soho, Mayfair and Richmond cinemas. Box office overall rose 13 per cent that weekend, because it was on more screens at the Picturehouse chain. The fact that the film held not just its screens but also the vast majority of the showtimes also helped.

In general, this summer has seen a poor



Sebastião Salgado in *The Salt of the Earth*

commercial performance by the arthouse sector, especially in drama; documentaries, including *The Salt of the Earth*, *Iris*, *The Wolfpack* and – of course – *Amy*, have provided some of the brighter moments. Takings for *Salt...* stand at £272,000 at press time, which compares with £66,400 for *13 Minutes*, £42,400 for *The Wonders* and a disappointing £123,000 for the seemingly commercially potent *Eden*.

Although Curzon achieved a nice result with a sold-out Q&A preview screening at the 700-seat Curzon Chelsea back in May, capitalising on Salgado’s presence in London for another event, the distributor shied away from a live-satellite-broadcast strategy that has worked well for recent documentaries, including *Hockney*. “We knew that Salgado was a draw for audiences as he had sold out exhibitions in London, but we couldn’t accurately predict how that would translate into cinema ticket sales,” Rushton says – a polite way of saying that Salgado isn’t David Hockney, and the national demand for a live interview in cinemas was questionable. “What we were confident about was that once people started seeing the film for themselves that it would generate great word of mouth, and so that was the strategy that we followed.”

TOP FOREIGN-LANGUAGE DOCUMENTARIES AT UK BOX OFFICE

Film	Year	Gross
Buena Vista Social Club	1999	£955,278
Etre et avoir	2003	£708,116
Pina	2011	£666,263
The Salt of the Earth	2015	£272,021*
Dior and I	2015	£ 235,739
Nostalgia for the Light	2012	£153,055
The Act of Killing	2013	£133,016
Into Great Silence	2006	£122,781
The Look of Silence	2015	£106,893*

Some films also include English-language scenes; *gross at press time

SMOKE ALARM

BFI FILM FUND INSIGHTS

The British film industry is not nearly as London-centric as people think – but the capital's gravitational pull is still a problem



By Ben Roberts

I've got a *Frenzy* poster behind my desk – one of my favourite Hitchcock films, not least because I can see the parts of London I

love, but in ways I barely recognise. My colleague Heather also introduced me to the slightly mad 1947 sheep-farm drama *The Loves of Joanna Godden*, where I can look at Romney Marsh (where I live now) shot in black and white by Douglas Slocombe – and it's barely changed.

The success of the BFI's new Britain on Film archive map show how much pleasure we derive from watching films – fact or fiction – about people and places close to home. Having grown up in Coventry and studied in Leeds, I couldn't agree more with calls for more arts funding to be distributed across the UK and outside London; and that goes for our Lottery investment in filmmaking.

Actually, it might surprise you that most of the films we support are set and shot somewhere other than London. Of the 47 films we've funded since 2012, I counted only eight that were shot in the capital. And many of our best contemporary storytellers – Clio Barnard, Ben Wheatley, Peter Strickland, Shane Meadows, Lynne Ramsay, Andrew Haigh – live and work outside London.

This month, the Toronto International Film Festival (TIFF) is showcasing emerging filmmakers from London in its annual, roaming City to City sidebar. When we met the programmers in the summer we told them we weren't sure how they would fill their slots with new London films. Sure enough, of the eight films selected, only half – *Kill Your Friends*, *Urban Hymn*, *The Hard Stop* and *The Ones Below* – are set in the capital. The others were *London Road* (Ipswich), *Couple in a Hole* (France), *Kajaki* (Jordan) and *Northern Soul* (Bury).

So London isn't quite the talent hoover we thought? Perhaps, but this is only half the story.

The BFI NETWORK has pushed almost all of our discovery and development of emerging talent out of London. And there are more UK and European production incentives to shoot in the nations and regions than to stay in London: the European Regional Development Funds (ERDF) in Yorkshire and the West Midlands; Pinewood's fund that it operates for the Welsh government, alongside their Isle of Man fund; plus separate Lottery pots from Northern Ireland Screen, Wales through

It might surprise you that most of the films the BFI Film Fund supports are set and shot somewhere other than London



Actually in Ipswich: *London Road*

Ffilm Cymru Wales, and a sizeable £4 million via Creative Scotland. But despite financial incentives, lower costs and good intentions, the rest of the UK still faces challenges in creating serious industry clusters outside London.

First, there is a continued shortage of high-level production and craft skills around the UK; in particular, department heads stay in London where they can work year-round. But Creative Skillset is funded to grow the national skills base, and the BFI Film Academies are developing filmmaking and craft skills among 16- to 19-year-olds. The government has just extended the film tax relief, to attract more international productions that will pay the skills levy and create jobs. The high-end TV tax credit should also help job creation and demand for skills outside London.

Then London's post and VFX houses still account for much of the post-production work (though the growing games and digital animation sector may shift this over time). And of course nearly all the industry's distribution, exhibition, finance, legal, press and marketing decisions are made in London.

Finally, we need more producers living and working in other parts of the UK. Many new writers and directors we talk to want help finding a producer; most expect to find them in London. But there are great producers elsewhere, including Warp in Sheffield, Sigma in Glasgow, Emu in Manchester, Wellington in Nottingham, Third Films in Newcastle and Red and Black in Cardiff.

Creative England supports film businesses outside London through its Film Enterprise fund, and we are about to relaunch our Vision Awards to support evolving companies. We also recently launched a Creative Clusters Challenge Fund, which will support two or three regional public/private partnerships in building business cases for investment.

Northern Ireland might be the best example of a sustainable local industry being built through public investment. Northern Ireland Screen, which used big incentives to attract a large-scale production tenant (*Game of Thrones*) to Belfast, now has an infrastructure across film and TV, complete with studio facilities and local crew – supporting first features by Michael Lennox (*A Patch of Fog*) and Stephen Fingleton (*The Survivalist*), along with Ben Wheatley's *High-Rise* and James Gray's Brad Pitt-produced *Lost City of Z*.

It can be done! 📍

Ben Roberts is director of the BFI Film Fund @bfibfen

IN PRODUCTION

● **Martin Scorsese** and Leonardo DiCaprio just can't get enough: the director and star are to team up for the sixth time on a long-in-development adaptation of Erik Larson's book *The Devil in the White City: Murder, Magic and Madness at the Fair that Changed America*. DiCaprio will play H.H. Holmes, who murdered anywhere between 27 and 200 people in 19th-century Chicago.

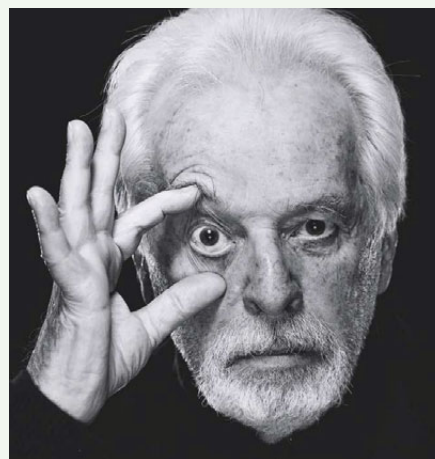
● **Fatih Akin**, the Turkish-German director best known for his 2004 *amour fou* tale *Head-On*, is to adapt the cult novel *Tschick*, by the late German author Wolfgang Herrndorf. The novel follows a dysfunctional 14-year-old boy who one summer befriends a young Russian immigrant, nicknamed Tschick, and sets off on a road trip with him.

● **Fred Schepisi** is to direct an adaptation of comic thriller *Andorra* by American author Peter Cameron. The story concerns a 40-year-old American who, on a visit to Europe, befriends an Australian couple, only for things to turn sour when he falls in love with the wife, and a corpse is found in the harbour. James Ivory is an executive producer.

● **Richard Linklater** is reportedly the hot favourite to direct Jennifer Lawrence in *The Rosie Project*, based on Graeme Simsion's novel about a genetics professor who creates a scientific questionnaire to find his perfect mate, only to find his theories challenged when he falls for Lawrence's character Rosie, who has the exact opposite qualities.

● **Christopher Guest's** first film as director since 2006's *For Your Consideration* is to be *Mascots*. According to a note sent out by Netflix, which is supporting the film, it will follow "the drama, intrigue and occasional excitement of The 8th World Mascot Association Championships... where a group of 'unusual' men and women, with big heads and furry suits, compete to win the prestigious Gold Fluffy Award and be crowned best mascot in the world."

● **Alejandro Jodorowsky** (below) has launched a crowdfunding campaign to complete his latest film, *Endless Poetry*. Jodorowsky needs to raise \$150,000 to complete post-production on the autobiographical film, which is being shot by Christopher Doyle, and centres on Jodorowsky's life as a poet in Santiago in the 1940s.



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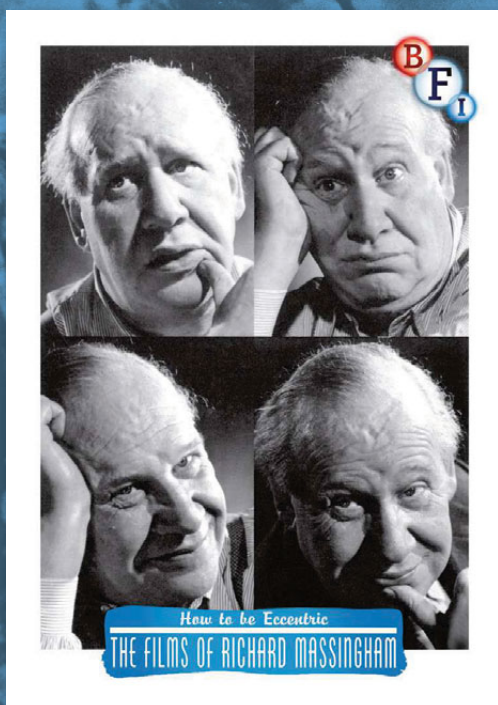
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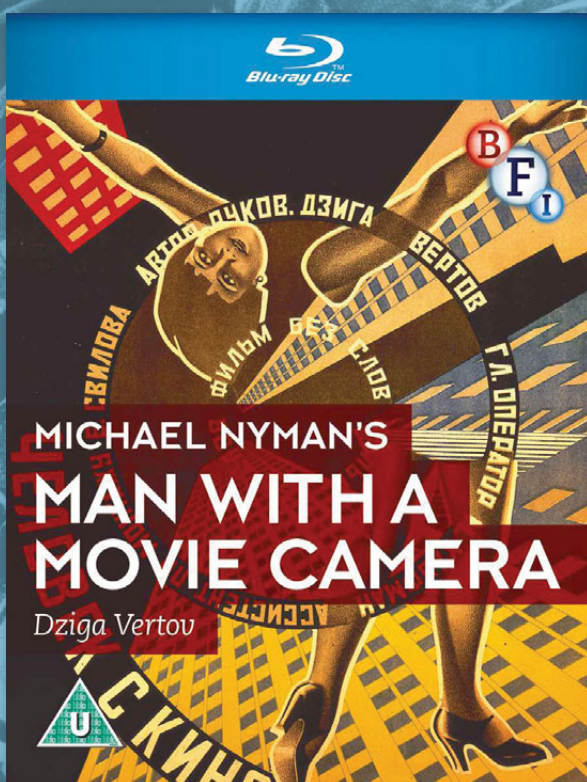


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Famous for discovering new talent, the Swiss resort this year became an advert for the joys of rediscovery

By Neil Young

Welcome to Locarno: a great place to die. Good enough for Robert Siodmak, Erich Maria Remarque, Hans Richter, Patricia Roc and Paul Klee, who all breathed their last in or around low-tax Switzerland's warmest town. Patricia Highsmith, a long-time resident of the country's Italian-speaking Ticino canton spent her last seven years in nearby Tegna, dying at Locarno's La Carità hospital in February 1995. Her adoptive home was "a mysterious place," she wrote, "composed of a lot of granite said to have a magnetic effect, draining one's energy". But for many filmmakers, Locarno has had the opposite effect.

The festival was revived in 2009 by Olivier Père's appointment as artistic director. Over three editions the urbane, well-connected Frenchman transformed somnolent Locarno, giving it its current status as a favoured destination for members of the pantheon of global cinephilia: Pedro Costa, Lav Diaz, Albert Serra, Athina Tsangari, Ben Rivers...

To maintain Locarno's reputation as a festival of discovery, the affable artistic director Carlo Chatrian and head programmer Mark Peranson depend on trajectories like those of Avishai Sivan. Though his directorial debut *The Wanderer* had premiered at Cannes in 2010, the 38-year-old Israeli arrived in Locarno relatively unknown – and departed trailing comparisons with Dreyer, Von Trier and Aronofsky. His *Tikkun*, a taboo-breaking study of a yeshiva student's quasi-miraculous physical-spiritual-psychological renaissance won the jury's runner-up prize (and special mention for Shai Goldman's monochrome cinematography).

This was a turnabout for Israeli cinema: the noisiest pre-festival controversy erupted when 200 film professionals, including Ken Loach, signed a petition against an industry-only sidebar promoting Israeli works-in-progress. They expressed "deep concern with the fact that the festival is choosing to partner with the Israel Film Fund and Ministry of Foreign Affairs, [following the] election of the most racist, far-right government in Israel's history".

Though this ancient town attracts international critics, producers and festival-programmers seeking new blood, the 68th edition of Locarno was dominated by long-established names. The Golden Leopard went to the prolific Korean director Hong Sangsoo for *Right Now, Wrong Then*, and Lake Maggiore's flotsam-clogged, tourist-haunted shores were a haven for seasoned maestros on the comeback trail. The 89-year-old Georgian director Marlen Khutsiev, subject of an enthusiastically received 35mm retrospective, has his first feature since 2001 well



Korea best: Hong Sangsoo's Golden Leopard-winning *Right Now, Wrong Then*

under way, the defiantly titled *Not Yet Evening*. The 81-year-old Otar Iosseliani – Paris-based for three decades but like Khutsiev, born in Tbilisi – opted for the more valedictory sounding *Winter Song* for his first outing since *Chantrapas* (2010); but this dark-edged overlong divertissement was overlooked by the festival jury.

Cinema has become an unhealthily middle-class pursuit, over-reliant on film schools; directors' biographies can make for depressingly homogenous reading, and it's rare to find contemporary equivalents of Iosseliani – who, after Soviet censors banned his early efforts, abandoned film for two years to work on a fishing-boat and in a factory. Perhaps a long break has benefits – especially if the hiatus is used to amass life-experience unavailable in an unbroken whirligig of film sets and festivals.

Lake Maggiore's flotsam-clogged, tourist-haunted shores were a haven for seasoned maestros on the comeback trail



José Luis Guerín's *The Academy of Muses*

That might go some way to explaining the success of another venerable Paris-dwelling émigré, the 74-year-old Polish provocateur Andrzej Zulawski. Since *Fidelity* in 2000, he had devoted himself to literature, publishing 15 books in as many years; at Locarno he staged an audaciously energetic return, being named Best Director for the intellectual farce *Cosmos*. Adapted from Witold Gombrowicz's 1967 novel, the film chronicles a neurasthenic young writer's frantic search for meaning in a universe tantalisingly a-tremble with potential semiotic significance. Though *Cosmos* is exasperatingly uneven, its barrelling brio advertises the benefits of 'exile'.

Similarly, the Catalan writer-director José Luis Guerín has concentrated on academe since the success of *In the City of Sylvia* (2007). He made three documentaries in 2011, but *The Academy of Muses* (*La academia de las musas*) – presented in the outstanding Signs of Life sidebar – is his first fiction feature for eight years: a middle-aged professor expounds theories on the origins of music, and on muses as sources of inspiration – then puts the latter into practice with the (intimate) assistance of his female students. Erudite, sensitively mature and wickedly comic, *The Academy of Muses* was the most universally admired of Locarno's unveilings; hopefully, its reception will herald a busy new phase in Guerín's sparse filmography.

In October 1987 Bob Dylan began a concert on the 7,000-seat Piazza Grande utterly jaded, only to famously experience a creativity-recharging epiphany on a "foggy, windy" Ticino night. "It's almost like I heard it as a voice. It wasn't like it was even me thinking it: 'I'm determined to stand, whether God will deliver me or not.'" Locarno is an excellent spot to sign off – but it can also be a powerful locus of rebirth. 

THE FEMALE GAZE



100 OVERLOOKED FILMS DIRECTED BY WOMEN

Over the next 20 pages we celebrate a selection of remarkable works by female filmmakers that have unjustly slipped from public view, in the hope we can correct their place in film history and help them find a wider audience – including choices by Jane Campion, Greta Gerwig, Claire Denis and Agnès Varda among many others. **Introduction by Isabel Stevens**

In 1968 Ida Lupino was the sole female director to merit an entry in Andrew Sarris's auteur bible *The American Cinema: Directors and Directions 1929-1968*. Lupino's films were dismissed in a sentence; the rest of Sarris's pithy capsule drew attention to a "ladies' auxiliary" in cinema, listing notable female directors of the silent era and later, as well as those "the jury is still out on" (Shirley Clarke, Vera Chytilová and Agnès Varda among them). Dorothy Arzner, who directed 13 films after 1929 (plus two she was not credited for), only gets mentioned as an auxiliary. Although he didn't question why there was such a paucity of female directors, Sarris at least highlighted the fact at a time when few others did, and extended his search for them beyond the US. However he needlessly resurrects Lillian Gish's statement about directing being no job for a lady, and hardly skewers it ("Simone de Beauvoir would undoubtedly argue the contrary").

Female directors didn't fare much better in the pages of *Sight & Sound* in those years (despite a female editor, Penelope Houston), although when their films were released in the UK they received their due reviews in the then quarterly's sister publication, *Monthly Film Bulletin*. Before the 1980s, of those filmmakers Sarris notes, only Chytilová, Varda and Leni Riefenstahl had features written about them in *S&S*, in addition to animator Lotte Reiniger, the Russian auteur Larisa Shepitko and avant-gardiste Maya Deren, who he didn't. The first time Shirley Clarke's career was appraised in these pages was in 1998, in her obituary.

Much vital work has been done since by critics, film historians, academics and programmers to write female filmmakers back into history. The damage, though, is deep-rooted. In April this year *Vanity Fair* credited Lupino as "one of the first" female directors "to crack the whip", ignoring predecessors such as Alice Guy-Blaché and Lois Weber, who were working up to 50 years before her. As Mark Cousins points out in his Dispatches column this month (see page 11), depressing statistics illustrating the still unequal numbers of female filmmakers working today, and the (justified) internet outrage they provoke, tend to obscure those filmmakers who have gone before. Other than decrying the status quo and highlighting and critiquing new films by female directors, what can a film magazine do? Well, one option is to cast light on great female-directed films that have slipped through the net of male-auteur-

Few female filmmakers have had the luxury of making more than a couple of features – too few to achieve auteur status

centred criticism and such canon-forming exercises as *Sight & Sound*'s Greatest Films poll.

With that in mind, contributors to this feature – who range from filmmakers to critics, academics to programmers – were asked to nominate a film by a female director they believe has been forgotten or unfairly overlooked. In August 2007, *S&S* produced a similar 'Hidden Gems' issue, unearthing 75 lost and forgotten films by men and women, which shone a light on, among others, Nicole Védres's *Paris 1900*, Sally Potter's *The Gold Diggers* and Barbara Loden's *Wanda* (discussed on page 24 by Isabelle Huppert). In recent years more underappreciated films by women have resurfaced, such as Claudia Weill's *Girlfriends* (explored on page 27 by both Greta Gerwig and Allison Anders). We were never in any doubt that there were more out there.

This list's focus is primarily the 20th century – before the democratising advance of digital technology made it easier for women to make films, and the galvanising force of the internet enabled a wider critical advocacy; but also to ameliorate short-term memory syndromes. The list is dominated by features, since these need more money and support of the kind that's been in short supply for female directors since the silent era – in the world of avant-garde short films, by contrast, women have faced men on more equal terms, and have enjoyed more success and critical esteem.

'Forgotten' and 'overlooked' are nebulous terms, particularly in the internet age, when everything is supposedly rediscovered, and our list of 100 films reflects that – including both undeniable obscurities (*The Enchanted Desna* by Yuliya Solntseva, who was namechecked by Sarris merely as "Dovzhenko's widow"), as well as films by relatively lauded directors (such as Elaine May and Kira Muratova) that are either hard to find or not regarded nearly as highly as we feel they should be. Sadly, a far simpler proposition would

Dorothy Arzner (right) was one of only two female directors in Hollywood from the 1930s to 60s

be to note those female filmmakers who are appreciated, and whose work is regularly seen in cinemas – though such a shortlist might reveal still deeper problems, dominated as it would be by white Europeans and Americans.

Few female filmmakers have had the luxury of making more than a couple of features. So how do you achieve auteur status with so few films to your name? And how much more quickly do your films fade from history as a result? As the number of films listed here by actresses-turned-directors shows, women have often had to acquire power in front of the camera before being allowed behind it. Also included are films that stood at the edges of famous movements in cinema (Jacqueline Audry's *Les Petits Matins* and the French New Wave, Lorenza Mazzetti's *Together* and Free Cinema, Li Hong's *Out of Phoenix Bridge* and China's New Documentary Movement), which were obscured by the work of more renowned and prolific male directors. Revealing, too, is the surprising number of female filmmakers who died tragically young: Barbara Loden, Sara Gómez, Kathleen Collins, Larisa Shepitko, whose films are highlighted here, but also Nicole Védres and Forough Farrokhzad.

Of course, looking only at directors masks those women who work in other film industry roles – particularly those in the silent era, when women played a major part in all facets of filmmaking. As the only two female directors working in the Hollywood studios from the 1930s to the 60s, Ida Lupino and Dorothy Arzner were obviously important, but their careers don't tell the whole story of women's work and influence in the dream factory (see Mark Cousins's previous *S&S* Dispatches columns on female editors or Lizzie Francke's excellent book *Script Girls*). Nor should it obscure the fact that women were making great films outside Hollywood at that time – in the UK, Norway, Mexico, China and beyond.

Time for a disclaimer: this list is far from definitive, but we hope it gives a sense of some of the great, unduly neglected films made by women throughout film history from all over the world – and of the many others out there awaiting reappraisal too. 

For more articles around this subject, visit bfi.org.uk/sightandsound. A season relating to this project will take place next year at BFI Southbank, London 



THE GIRL SPY BEFORE VICKSBURG

Sidney Olcott & Gene Gauntier (US, 1910)

Although Sidney Olcott is traditionally listed as the sole director, we need to remember that when the film was made, moving picture work was highly collaborative and screen credits did not yet appear, so advancing Gene Gauntier under the category of 'director' of any of her Kalem Company films is intended to challenge assumptions about early cinema 'job' descriptions. Gauntier's *The Girl Spy Before Vicksburg*, one of her three cross-dressing action heroine shorts, predates *The Perils of Pauline*-type serial queens and is a forerunner of the American visceral 'sensation cinema' so admired by Sergei Eisenstein. The extant film, held in Amsterdam's EYE Film Institute, epitomises the fast-action exploits and explosions she innovated. Dressed as a Confederate soldier, the girl spy plants an explosive in a Northern supply wagon and runs forward in the frame, ducking into the tall grass in the foreground just as the wagon explodes in the background – in one shot. This scene might have been one of those recalled in her 1928 memoir *Blazing the Trail*: "They never seemed difficult when I was seated before the typewriter in the throes of creating them, but as the moment for performance drew near they assumed unwarranted aspects of terror." **Jane Gaines**

SUSPENSE

Lois Weber & Phillips Smalley (US, 1913)

The techniques designed to create suspense in thrillers – as used, for instance, by Alfred Hitchcock – were developed in this short film. When a roving tramp threatens a woman and child in an isolated house, a real-time chase ensues, with the woman's husband racing back from town to save her while the tramp slowly makes his way through the house. One truly terrifying scene in close-up has the tramp's arm groping for the lock through a hole punched in the door in a "Here's Johnny!" kind of way. The tension comes from cross-cutting between simultaneous actions, increasing the pace through the editing rhythm, innovative perspectives and thought-through narrative logic. *Suspense* is a highly condensed film in which not a frame is wasted – indeed, in one celebrated scene, exposition is further condensed even *within* the frame, which is split three ways to show three concurrent actions. The fact that the audience knew what was going to happen didn't stop them being terrified, which is the trick that thrillers and horror films have pulled off ever since. **Bryony Dixon**

THE OCEAN WAIF

Alice Guy-Blaché (US, 1916)

Where Alice Guy-Blaché's status as a film pioneer is acknowledged, she is credited with directing the first narrative film, *La Fée aux choux*, in 1896. *The Ocean Waif* (1916), a five-reel romcom made at her own production company Solax in the US 20 years later, reveals her dexterity with story, but above all her affinity with actors. The woman who posted



A race against time: *Suspense* (1913)

the instruction 'Be natural' prominently in her studio directs two now-obscure names, Doris Kenyon and Carlyle Blackwell, as lovers thrown together by chance. She's an abused tomboy teen on the run, he's a fancy novelist looking for a writing retreat, and they meet when they both hole up in an abandoned cottage. Each half of the couple has equal screen time, but it's Kenyon who radiates as a nicely underplayed fish out of water. The glee with which Blackwell 'discovers' Kenyon is no ghost, but flesh and blood, is infectious. **Pamela Hutchinson**

THE GIRL IN TAILS

Karin Swanström (Sweden, 1926)

Swanström was a Swedish actress, director and later film studio executive who eventually discovered Ingrid Bergman. In this charming film about a small rebellion, she takes the comic and ultimately poignant role of a widow who tyrannises the small-minded, conservative village of Wadköping. Magda Holm plays the clever and spirited Katja, who, indignant at getting second-class treatment as a girl, attends a graduation ball in her brother's dress suit. Revelling in her new sexy persona, Katja speaks her mind and samples masculine freedoms – cigars, schnapps, a dance with a girl. Ostracised by her shocked neighbours and family, she takes refuge in an idyllic commune for intellectual women. With its easygoing humour and lovely bucolic setting, the film ends up on the side of resolution and social harmony, but it is the heroine's one, elated night of rule-breaking that makes it memorable. **Imogen Sara Smith**

THE SEASHELL AND THE CLERGYMAN

Germaine Dulac (France, 1928)

Dulac remains best remembered for *The Seashell and the Clergyman*, banned in Britain after the BBFC called it "so cryptic as to be almost meaningless", adding that "if it has a meaning, it is doubtless objectionable". Its meaning was hotly contested: according to legend, it sparked a near-riot at its premiere in February 1928 as various surrealists objected to differences between her film and Antonin Artaud's scenario about a priest who lusts after a general's wife – despite Artaud recording his satisfaction with Dulac's interpretation.

Before moving into film in 1915, Dulac edited the feminist review *La Française* and wrote plays. She established herself with *The Smiling Madame Beudet* (1922), a feminist work about a smart woman in a loveless marriage, and impressed critics with *L'Invitation au voyage* (1927). *The Seashell and the Clergyman*'s poetic qualities shine through: with its simmering sexuality, dream-like overlays and fractured perspectives, it remains the most sensuous attempt to transfer the surrealist sensibility into cinema. **Juliet Jacques**

KNOWING MEN

Elinor Glyn (UK, 1930)

Noted British-born romantic writer Glyn scripted the 1924 Hollywood adaptation of her notorious 1907 novel *Three Weeks* and is known for coining the 'It' – denoting personal magnetism or sexual allure – of *It*, the 1927 Clara Bow vehicle adapted from Glyn's novella. Glyn worked in Hollywood throughout the 20s as a screenwriter, consultant and mentor, nurturing a successful formula of upper-class settings, old romanticism and risqué eroticism in a dozen or so features. She returned home at the dawn of the sound era, supremely confident that her Hollywood know-how would rescue the ailing British film industry; and in 1930, with her own company, produced and directed two romantic comedies at Elstree.

In *Knowing Men*, heiress Korah (Elissa Landi) tries to dodge fortune-hunters by posing as a marquise's companion. The plot might be creaky, but the film is attractively shot, its settings are lavish, the costumes are exquisite, and Landi performs charmingly. Nevertheless, a female outsider breezing in from Hollywood and telling the Brits how it should be done clearly put backs up, because the film met an excessively hostile reception on its release. **Annette Kuhn**

MERRILY WE GO TO HELL

Dorothy Arzner (US, 1932)

Arzner is not exactly obscure – she reportedly made more pictures in the studio system than any other female filmmaker. *Dance, Girl, Dance* (1940) is often considered her classic but *Merrily We Go to Hell* doesn't get the love it deserves. A pre-Code drama dealing with real adult issues and pain (an open marriage, alcoholism, what one will do for love), its pairing of the lovelorn, though never pathetic heiress (Sylvia Sydney) married to the dipsomaniacal, adulterous playwright (Fredric March) is sublime, complicated and emotional as Sydney also agrees to cheating, to be a modern woman, in alliance with (and love for) her husband. But it just doesn't work and rather than make March the villain, he's instead a richly conceived, flawed man, not without empathy for his wife Sydney's sad yet hopeful eyes, conveying so much depth. It's astoundingly touching that Arzner knew that March would see this too. So, no victims or devils here, just real live human beings. **Kim Morgan**

LA MUJER DE NADIE

Adela Sequeyro (Mexico, 1937)

Sequeyro (1901-92) started her career very early

as a film journalist and an actress in silent films. She became the first woman director of Mexican sound cinema with *La mujer de nadie* (*Nobody's Wife*). She was also the producer, screenwriter, editor and beautiful star of this film set in the 19th century, a melodrama that tells the story of a young woman forced to leave home because her stepfather abuses her. She then receives protection from three bohemian men who give her shelter, fall madly in love with her, and believe her to be their muse. She secretly reciprocates the love of one of her admirers, but decides to leave their house in order not to disturb their brotherly harmony, heading toward a destiny that attests to the triumphant independence of the title. A year later Sequeyro directed her second and last film, *Diabillos de arrabal* (1938), newly restored, which is a significant predecessor of Buñuel's *Los olvidados* (1950), in that it dared to portray homeless children in Mexico City. She made both films with her own production company, but their commercial failure led her to abandon directing and return to being a respected film journalist. **Daniela Michel**

GOLDEN GATE GIRL

Esther Eng (US/China, 1941)

San Francisco-born Eng (1914-70) brought *Heartaches* (1935) – a Cantonese talkie she co-produced in Hollywood – to Hong Kong in 1936 and subsequently became South China's first female director. Most of her 11 feature films focus on unfulfilled love and reject conventional portraits of mothers, wives and daughters. Like her Hollywood contemporary, Dorothy Arzner (who, like Eng, was openly lesbian), Eng never compels women to fulfil domestic roles. After WWII broke out, she directed *Golden Gate Girl* in San Francisco with veteran filmmaker Moon Kwan. The story follows a Chinese-American girl who falls for a Cantonese opera star against her father's wishes and becomes pregnant. After she dies giving birth to a daughter (played by a baby Bruce Lee), the child is left in the care of two men, her father's salesman and cook, but is later reconciled with her estranged grandfather during a fundraising performance for China War Relief. The film was positively reviewed by *Variety* and praised at home for its "correct ideology and touching plot", showing to audiences across South-East Asia. Sadly, there are no known prints of the film, although copies still survive on VHS. **Louisa Wei**

HOMES FOR THE PEOPLE

Kay Mander (UK, 1945)

Told by producer Michael Balcon at Ealing Studios that she wouldn't be able to control a male crew, Mander went on to direct almost 50 films, although subsequently returned to continuity work, saying that "I palpably had the skills" but couldn't face "batTLing" to continue directing. *Homes for the People* (1945) is one of her most radical films – it uses the bold yet simple technique of encouraging five working-class women to describe their living conditions, in their own words. "I call it a muck-up," one of them declares from her kitchen sink about the design of her suburban house. 



Wild tales: Lotte Reiniger's *The Adventures of Prince Achmed* (1926)

OUT OF THE SHADOWS

In the late 80s female animators were shaping the future of the form – but since then women's voices have faded from the industry. **By Ruth Lingford**

When I discovered animation in 1988, as a mature student, I had no shortage of formidable female role models. Lotte Reiniger had made the earliest surviving animated feature film in 1926 – *The Adventures of Prince Achmed* – and Mary Ellen Bute had produced the first electronically generated images in film. Contemporary female animators were shaping the future of the form. Vera Neubauer was making raw, challenging films, Alison de Vere had just made *Black Dog* (1987), Caroline Leaf was in her prime, and Susan Young was the hippest force in British commercial animation. In the work of Suzan Pitt, Michaela Pavlatova and Michèle Cournoyer, I could see myself and my concerns reflected in animation that prioritised interiority with an unabashed autobiographical quality. Animation seemed like a female-friendly artform, with its craft associations and its cottage-industry promise of self-sufficiency. It also seemed to demand less energetic egotism than other forms of filmmaking.

The 90s were a very good decade for women in animation. Channel 4's commitment to supporting minority-interest work was a huge factor, and under Clare Kitson's reign as commissioning editor for animation, the careers of Joanna Quinn, Erica Russell, Petra

Freeman, Candy Guard and Marjut Rimminen, myself and many others flourished

Over the intervening decades, I have watched with dismay as women's voices drain out of animation, and I have often tried to fathom what is going on. I have certainly taught legions of talented female students (notably Suzie Templeton, whose *Peter and the Wolf* won an Oscar without compromising her dark vision), and a few of them are hanging in there as directors. But increasingly, women opt for enabling roles in production rather than direction. Some people cite the rise of complex computer technology as a factor in the dearth of women in the field. There may be something to this, but most of my female students are unafraid of technology. Maybe it is more to do with a sort of geek culture that has grown up around some sectors of animation. The Gamergate controversy, in which a number of feminists in the computer game industry faced an online campaign of harassment, was a shocking reminder of the hatred and fear of women that persists in some communities.

Of course, there are still formidable women. Nina Paley and Signe Baumane in the US are making independent features. Julia Pott is making a series in Los Angeles. The Film Board of Canada still supports women animators.

And maybe Pixar's *Inside Out* (though there are vanishingly few women involved in its making) owes its existence to a history of interiority in animated film that was predominantly women's contribution to the medium. 

Animation seemed like a female-friendly artform, with its cottage-industry promise of self-sufficiency

It's a rare, fascinating glimpse into the everyday lives of ordinary housewives in the 1940s and their hopes for better housing after the war. Mander was one of several British female documentarians of the time – Jill Craigie also puts the spotlight on housing in her stylish dramatised documentary *The Way We Live* (1946), which shows the cramped life of a family in post-war Plymouth. Earlier, in the 1930s, Marion and Ruby Grierson (sisters of the celebrated John), each made their own films, beautifully combining visual and sound techniques with wit and penetrating observation. **Ros Cranston**

THE LAST STAGE

Wanda Jakubowska (Poland, 1948)

Dubbed the 'grandmother of Polish cinema', Jakubowska (1907-98) began dabbling in film in the early 1930s and made her feature debut with *The Last Stage*, the first feature-length Holocaust drama. Set and partly filmed in Auschwitz (Jakubowska and several colleagues were recent inmates), the film was criticised for its pro-Soviet stance and for minimising the Jewish experience in favour of that of Poles and Communists (Jakubowska only ticked the last two boxes herself), but its combination of unflinching brutality and careful anatomising of the camp's complex hierarchies garnered favourable comparisons with Roberto Rossellini's

early neorealist features. Jakubowska made a dozen more films, all neglected today (although this may have more to do with her now unfashionable politics than her gender), but as a professor at the Lodz Film School (1949-74) she had a massive influence on generations of Polish filmmakers. **Michael Brooke**

DEATH IS A CARESS

Edith Carlmar (Norway, 1949)

Death Is a Caress (*Døden er et kjærtegn*) was the first Norwegian film directed by a woman, and the country's first *film noir*. It does not look like a *noir*: flooded with sunlight, the film breathes a clean, healthy northern air, scented with pines and seashore brine. For a long time, the story does not follow any expected *noir* formula either. Erik, a handsome young auto mechanic (Claus Wiese), begins an affair with a wealthy married older woman, Sonja (Bjørn Riiser-Larsen). But no murder plot or guilty flight follows; instead there is a matter-of-fact divorce and the lovers marry. Then, gradually, organically, their relationship starts to sour. They come from different worlds. He is callow, she is hysterical; they have fits of jealousy and sulks; their quarrels begin to turn violent. How a healthy, normal relationship that meets few obstacles ends in despair and blood is the dark thread of this unusual film: an everyday melodrama. **Imogen Sara Smith**

OUTRAGE

Ida Lupino (US, 1950)

A young woman leaves work late one night and walks home whistling gaily, no doubt with happy thoughts of her recent engagement. Making her way down dark passages between industrial units, she hears a voice from the gloom and begins to run. A man doggedly pursues her as she looks for a place to hide; when she accidentally sets off the horn of a truck he closes in, the camera rising rapidly away from the scene to take in a disgruntled resident who leans out of an upstairs window looking for the source of the disturbance.

This compelling scene is the dramatic focus of Ida Lupino's third feature as director, made by her own production company, Filmakers. Inspired by Italian neorealism, British-born Lupino and her husband Collier Young wanted the freedom to make films independently. She was clearly also keen to tell female-centred stories from the woman's point of view and this tale attempts to portray the profound effect that sexual assault can have. Although the censors excised all references to rape from the script, and the psychology is simplistic and clumsy, the film remains a powerful example of the work of one of Hollywood's pioneer female directors. **Josephine Botting**

STREETWALKER

Matilde Landeta (Mexico, 1951)

Landeta's third film *Streetwalker* (*Trotacalles*) was made after the director had worked for many years as an assistant director to some of the most prestigious Mexican filmmakers of the time, such as Emilio 'Indio' Fernandez and Julio Bracho. Her melodrama explores the vulnerability and inequality of women in post-revolutionary Mexico, via the story of two estranged sisters (portrayed by stunning Czech émigré Miroslava Stern and Elda Peralta), both of whom end up as prostitutes but for very different reasons. The film openly questions why Miroslava's Elena, a woman who has married for money, and who repeatedly describes herself as "pragmatic", should be considered less of a prostitute than her sister Maria, who has to sell her body cheaply on the streets after being seduced and exploited by a man she thinks she loves.

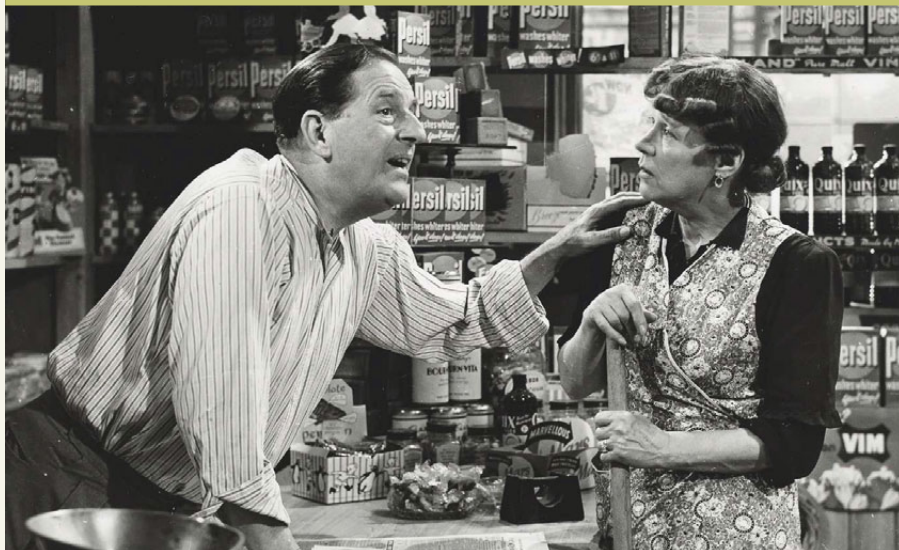
The film's *noir* elements – its suggestion that destiny is unavoidable in a society where women are considered to be objects – are quite remarkable. A dispute with government bureaucrats meant this was the last feature film Landeta would direct for almost 40 years, ending the career of the only female director in the Mexican film industry during those decades. **Daniela Michel**

THE STRANGER LEFT NO CARD

Wendy Toye (UK, 1952)

When a top-hatted, tail-coated eccentric breezes into town (Windsor, as it happens), the inhabitants quickly warm to his antics and magic tricks. The tone of this accomplished short film – Toye's first – remains jaunty, almost

CAROL MORLEY ON...



THE HAPPY FAMILY

Muriel Box (UK, 1952)

Despite much opposition during her filmmaking years, with studio bosses declaring that women did not have the qualities to control a feature film, Box directed and co-wrote an impressive number of British films between the late 1940s and early 60s.

Born into what she called "respectable poverty", Box was committed to giving women and working-class people a voice. In *The Happy Family* (aka *Mr. Lord Says No*) Lillian

Lord, after years of being a cleaner, finally owns a shop-cum-house. But compulsory demolition looms, to make way for the Festival of Britain site on the South Bank. Lillian, whose mother was a suffragette, leads her family in defiant protest. With its humour and charm, the film could be the sister project to *Passport to Pimlico* (1949).

Ada, Lillian's unmarried sister, says, "I've had my moments even if I don't brag about them," and this sums up *The Happy Family* and Box's directing in general: unflashy, genuine and bittersweet. **Carol Morley** 🍷

two, for most of its 23-minute running time, as Alan Badel relishes playing the “remarkable fellow” dubbed Napoleon by the locals. But on day ten of his sojourn, the inane smile fades and the mood darkens as the purpose of the enigmatic stranger’s visit is finally revealed.

The film won Best Short Fictional Film at Cannes in 1953 and was much praised by Jean Cocteau, who had met Toye through her work in theatre choreography. Her dance training is vital to her skill as a filmmaker; movement is a strong feature of both this and her 1955 Oscar-nominated short *On the Twelfth Day...* Toye directed five successful but unremarkable British studio features and contributed the most chilling episode to the horror omnibus *Three Cases of Murder* (1955), but this debut remains her most unusual and brilliant contribution to British film. **Josephine Botting**

THE ETERNAL BREASTS

Tanaka Kinuyo (Japan, 1955)

Tanaka Kinuyo is best known as the magnetic lead actress in numerous films by Yasujiro Ozu, Mizoguchi Kenji, Naruse Mikio and others, where she tended to be cast as women suffering the constraints imposed by a suffocating patriarchy. Less well known is the fact that she directed six of her own films, at least one of which, *The Eternal Breasts* (*Chibusa yo eien nare*), is pretty special. Based on a real-life story, the film follows Fumiko, a mother of two dissatisfied with her lot, who discovers an outlet through poetry and divorces her unfaithful husband. Diagnosed with breast cancer, she undergoes a mastectomy that seems to give her a new confidence and lease of life, at least for a while. There’s an unsparing frankness and directness to the film, especially around female sexual desire, which feels exhilarating. Towards the end, as death encroaches, Tanaka unleashes some bleak, fiercely potent images that will haunt you for weeks after seeing the film. **Kieron Corless**

TOGETHER

Lorenza Mazzetti (UK, 1956)

Free Cinema’s Lindsay Anderson, Karel Reisz and Tony Richardson would go on to features and fame, but looking back at the first programme of the movement’s 16mm short films, held at the National Film Theatre in London in 1956, it is Italian director Lorenza Mazzetti who emerges as the most radical poet of the ordinary. Her 52-minute study of the friendship between two deaf dockworkers in London’s East End is a narrative-tinged piece of street filmmaking, long before hybrids were the norm. The older, more insular of two men is played by artist Eduardo Paolozzi channelling Brando. His younger friend is the curious one with dreams and desires and the camera and soundtrack take his heed, alive to the life they are isolated from. Mazzetti freewheels with the pair through crowded markets and pubs, follows as they wander desolate bombed streets chased by taunting children and watches as they eat dinner in their boarding house surrounded by hostile gazes.

TILDA SWINTON ON...



A PORTRAIT OF GA

Margaret Tait (UK, 1952)

VINCENT THE DUTCHMAN

Mai Zetterling (UK, 1972)

I want to cheat and suggest two films: not least because they feel like they might form a beautiful double – two jewels.

Scottish director Margaret Tait’s miraculous four-minute *A Portrait of Ga* is a haiku from one of the cinema’s true poets. The images of Tait’s mother’s fingertips deftly unwrapping a sticky old boiled sweet from its cellophane, the sunlit hairs on her chin, her dauntlessly magnificent smoking, her leaping uphill towards a rainbow – this is portraiture of an exquisitely

lyrical nature, time and love distilled.

I caught sight of Swedish director Mai Zetterling’s *Vincent the Dutchman* 30 years ago and have never forgotten it. This is a film I cherish for its rawness and verve, a long, brave reach for a portrait, not of an intimate, private love, but of an inspiration, an icon, a man only ever sketched obliquely however many times he painted himself. As Van Gogh, the honest, clear-headed presence of Michael Gough brings a profound intelligence to the question ‘how to play’. Zetterling asks further, with frank *élan* and the help of equally dedicated contemporary artists, ‘how to make art and live a life?’. Tender and robust, thoughtful and heartfelt, formally candid and searchingly bright-eyed. **Tilda Swinton** 

Scriptwriter Denis Horne wanted dialogue but Mazzetti refused; and her melancholy, quiet tragedy is all the more potent, and true to the world of its protagonists, for it. **Isabel Stevens**

LES PETITS MATINS

Jacqueline Audry (France, 1962)

One of the few female filmmakers in post-war France, Audry directed many popular costume films, but *Les Petits Matins* is resolutely contemporary. It follows Agathe (Agathe Aëms), a young secretary who hitchhikes across France, from Belgium to the Côte d’Azur.

There are at least three reasons to rediscover the film. First is its delightfully irreverent modern heroine, who successfully deflects the unwanted attentions of a litany of male drivers – from cheesy jokes to attempted rape. Second is the roll call of great French actors (including Lino Ventura, Arletty and Jean-Claude Brialy) who play the various characters she encounters. Third it broadens our view of the *nouvelle vague*, with a film shot on location, with a New Wave actor (Brialy) but centred on a woman who has fun, gets her way and, unlike many New Wave heroines, is not punished for it. **Ginette Vincendeau**

EL CAMINO

Ana Mariscal (Spain, 1963)

Mariscal (1923-95) is now primarily remembered as an actress associated with the conservative screen roles of Francoist cinema: girlfriends, wives and mothers who unquestioningly accept the importance of sacrifice to the military duty of restoring order to a wayward Spain. Her own trajectory, however, defies such a simplistic classification, encompassing roles as the ‘other woman’, and work as a novelist, screenwriter and director. *El camino*, her adaptation of Miguel Delibes’s 1950 novel, offers a sharp, sly portrait of small-town life dominated by a conservative church seeking to police community morals. The makeshift cinema established in the village allows Mariscal to probe the politics of censorship in Spanish cinema as the parish priest promotes religious biopics he hopes will curb the locals’ pre-marital amorous adventures. The film also features a reference to Mariscal’s own 1952 directorial debut, the maligned *Segundo López, aventurero urbano*, a portrait of post-war Madrid melding neorealism with the picaresque, which similarly probes the rhetoric of a regime that too often pushed women into narrow roles. **Maria Delgado** 

SPARROWS CAN'T SING

Joan Littlewood (UK, 1963)

Based in Stratford, East London, Littlewood's Theatre Workshop revolutionised British theatre in the 1950s. Its big hit, Shelagh Delaney's *A Taste of Honey*, was, however, filmed by Tony Richardson, a director associated with the "very middle-class and proper" Royal Court. In 1962, having "never taken so much as a snapshot", Littlewood decided to film another Theatre Workshop production, Stephen Lewis's *Sparrows Can't Sing*, herself. Her freewheeling and collectivist methods collided head-on with the inflexible routines of the industry, and her diary records the experience as "the worst hell that I have ever been in".

The film itself, in which a volatile merchant seaman (James Booth) returns to a straying wife (Barbara Windsor) and a changing East End, is centrally concerned with community as at once nourishing and confining. The conflict between the familiar ways and new alternatives is embodied in Windsor's character, who lives in a towerblock and is first seen in a supermarket. **Henry K. Miller**

THE ENCHANTED DESNA

Yuliya Solntseva (Soviet Union, 1964)

There are few masterpieces harder to access than this 70-millimetre stereophonic poem by Moscow-born Yuliya Solntseva (1901-89), widow of the great Alexander Dovzhenko, who devoted most of her filmmaking career, after playing the title role in *Aelita* (1924), to assisting her Ukrainian husband and then filming his unrealised projects after his death.

I've never seen this subtitled, but Godard's favourite film of 1965 was periodically screened at the Paris Cinémathèque over the following decade, and I've managed to fill in a few details by reading an English translation of Dovzhenko's extended memoir of the same title. It's a rambling but exalted account of his impoverished rural childhood, where, as in his best features, it becomes impossible to distinguish reality from fantasy or imagination, or pantheistic epic from a kind of music dreamt in images – a reciprocal dance performed by nature, family and other eccentric local touchstones in perpetual, mysterious collaboration. Solntseva brings to this dance muted and shaded uses of widescreen colour and all-enveloping, multidirectional sound that her husband could only dream about. **Jonathan Rosenbaum**

WINGS

Larisa Shepitko (Soviet Union, 1966)

In *Wings* a female fighter pilot falls back to earth after WWII. No longer wanted by the military, Nadezhda 'Nadya' Petrukhina (Maya Bulgakova) becomes a headmistress. Constricted by civilian life, Nadya daydreams of looping the loop in the clouds, an upside-down world of space and light that contrasts with the grey reality of bureaucracy and school plays peopled by wooden Russian dolls.

As a portrait of a woman in all her frustration,

ISABELLE HUPPERT ON...



WANDA

Barbara Loden (US, 1970)

I first saw Barbara Loden's film many years ago, though it was long after its original release; despite support from Marguerite Duras, it had become more or less invisible, and was almost completely forgotten. But when I saw it, I was so full of admiration for it that we ended up restoring the film and releasing it first theatrically and eventually on DVD; indeed, we've just released it again, since the negative has now been restored by Martin Scorsese's Film Foundation.

It is such an extraordinary movie. Loden, who wrote, directed and took the lead role in it, was an actress, and the wife of Elia Kazan. The film – which is quite unusual in various ways and which centres on a woman who has left her husband and ends up going around with a guy who's basically a crook – was based on a true story Loden had read about, and she developed a whole fiction around that. What's so interesting is that this very realistic, very simple story is told in such a way that you can also read it as something more metaphorical – to do, perhaps, with Loden's own relationship both to the cinema and to a man, Kazan, whom she may have felt was stealing from her. And because it can be read in that way, the film becomes more conceptual and more universal in its relevance.

It's important if you make a film which is metaphorical or conceptual that it should also be credible as a story. Ordinarily it takes a lot of experience to be able to carry that off

properly; what's amazing about *Wanda* is that Loden managed to do it in her very first film. Sadly, because she died so young a few years later, she never got to make another film. (She was meant to appear in Kazan's 1969 film *The Arrangement*, but the studio didn't want her and she was replaced by Faye Dunaway.) And that's one reason why the film is so moving; it reflects Loden's own very sad destiny. It feels like a scream of someone just about surviving...

Of course, *Wanda* was made at a time when certain people were fighting against the constraints and contrivances of the old studio system; they were looking for new ways of filming, and *Wanda* shows a kind of freedom in the way it was made. The very opening scene where you see Wanda with curlers in her hair – I can't think of another American film that starts that way. It's weird, almost as if she was naked, but it's also funny, and faintly disturbing at the same time. Or there are those shots of huge black mountains of coal, which are also part of the film's aesthetic; they say so much about industry and poverty and work. Things like that set the tone for the whole film.

And of course *Wanda* is not some romanticised positive role model, but a real person. As a character I find her very moving. I feel as if I identify with Wanda, in that she's both fragile and strong at the same time; she may be alone, but deep down there is a real resistance in her. I find that very touching. I can't imagine such a film ever having been made by a man. But Loden did make it, and she did everything. **Isabelle Huppert** was speaking to Geoff Andrew

strength, shrugging acceptance and longing for lost love – both of a flying machine and a man – it is unsurpassed. *Wings* was Russian director Larisa Shepitko's first feature after film school, and her realist style is combined with exquisite cinematography. Shepitko's 1977 drama *The Ascent* won the Golden Bear at the Berlin Film Festival, and had she not died in a car crash at 40, we might be talking about her in the same breath as her

contemporaries Andrei Tarkovsky and Elem Klimov, who became her husband. **Kate Muir**

SHORT ENCOUNTERS

Kira Muratova (Soviet Union, 1967)

Made in Odessa in 1967, Muratova's first feature *Short Encounters* (also known as *Brief Encounters*) was banned for 20 years and only reached the West during the era of perestroika. A harassed

town official (Muratova herself) and a hesitant country girl who turns up on her doorstep secretly share the affections of an itinerant geologist (played by Russian singer-songwriter icon Vladimir Vysotsky), but neither can make him commit. The film boldly plays around with time, spinning back and forth between then and now, from country to town, the characters closely observed with a nervy camera style and a sculptural use of light. Muratova's sensibility was too wistful for the dictates of socialist realism, and she struggled to maintain a career until the 1990s, since when the films have flowed. The confrontational *The Asthenic Syndrome* (1990) was a defining portrait of the Gorbachev era, in which reality was depicted as far crazier than fiction, and Muratova has constantly juggled with the conventions of cinema in her very human stories. **David Thompson**

LA FIANCEE DU PIRATE

Nelly Kaplan (France, 1969)

A controversial example of counter-cinema, Kaplan's first solo fiction feature deserves a revival. Centring on Marie, daughter of a reputed witch, living with her pet goat on the edge of a rural backwater, it tells a story of gender, sex, power and resistance. After a motorist kills her mother, Marie learns the arts of seduction, enticing the village's various male inhabitants to her hut in the woods as a means of economic survival. With the villagers in uproar and the *abbé* threatening damnation, she creates a pagan installation of the consumer goods acquired through prostitution, disrupts a church service with a recording of her clients' visits, and, after setting fire to her hut, walks into the distance in jaunty Chaplin fashion.

Kaplan's taut control over camera and cutting, along with her surrealist eye for the overdetermined look, gesture or image, mirror the power of Marie's iconoclastic resistance to the hypocrisy of village life. Rather than reaffirming gendered stereotypes, Kaplan animates their core contradictions, exposed by the awakening of her heroine to a magical power associated not only with the natural world but with cinema. **Christine Gledhill**

I AM SOMEBODY

Madeline Anderson (US, 1969)

In 1969 Madeline Anderson was invited to Charleston to film the University of South Carolina's Medical College workers' strike. (All 400 strikers were black and only 12 weren't female.) While it's remarkable to see their actions expand to include Southern Christian Leadership Conference superstars Andrew Young and Coretta Scott King, students, and other labour unions, what defines the film is its narration. Striker Claire Brown reflects upon the personal toll the strike took, as well as the contradictory nature of "our" ante-bellum heritage. Directly addressing the tourists who visit Charleston's picturesque historic mansions – but never see the abject poverty, only blocks away, of those who created and maintain that beauty – her calm but damning testimony complicates the Confederacy's legacy

and the notion that women in the workforce is a recent feminist phenomenon. **Violet Lucca**

THE ARCH

Cecile Tang Shu Shuen (Hong Kong, 1970)

How radical Cecile Tang's period melodrama must have seemed in 1970, arriving in a Hong Kong film industry dominated by kung fu and opera films, and still a decade or so away from the New Wave it anticipates. Tang, who was born in Taiwan and studied in the US, was something of an outsider in the Hong Kong industry, even before her gender is taken into account, but she was one of the most original of any filmmakers active at the time (and the bravest – her follow-up, 1974's covertly-shot *China Behind*, was one of the first films to address the excesses of the Cultural Revolution). Set during the early Qing dynasty, *The Arch* focuses on a respected widow whose life is disrupted when a soldier is billeted to the house she shares with her daughter. The emotional turmoil and social disapproval aroused by the ensuing love triangle is vividly suggested in an intensely subjective mode that's been described as a mix of Mizoguchi, Alain Resnais and costume drama. The black-and-white cinematography by Subrata Mitra (DP on Satyajit Ray's *Apu Trilogy* and others) is achingly beautiful, but it's how the measured pace is often disrupted by rapid *nouvelle vague*-inspired editing (by Les Blank!) – employing freeze frames, jump cuts, dissolves and montage – as well as the unusual use of traditional instrumentation, voiceover narration and sound design that really make *The Arch* spellbindingly unique. **James Bell**

THE VELVET VAMPIRE

Stephanie Rothman (US/Philippines, 1971)

Made by the first female director to work for exploitation king Roger Corman, Rothman's *The Velvet Vampire* is a uniquely feminine 1970s West Coast take on the gothic fiend. The film opens in a Los Angeles art gallery, where the pale,

dark-haired Diane LeFanu (a reference to the author of early vampire story *Carmilla*) invites an attractive young couple to stay at her ranch in the desert. Rothman, who also co-wrote the script, didn't want her character to be either villain or victim and succeeds in creating a seductive, menacing, and at times poignant figure whose fluid, feral sexuality makes her apparently liberated guests increasingly anxious. Tonally close to Harry Kümel's *Daughters of Darkness*, Jess Franco's late 1960s work and Jean Rollin, *The Velvet Vampire* has a similar oneiric quality, lush beauty and narrative haziness, and makes great use of the arid, sun-beaten expanses of its unusual desert setting. **Virginie Sélavy**

SAMBIZANGA

Sarah Maldoror (Angola/France, 1972)

Sambizanga is as beautiful as a Caravaggio painting. Maldoror was born in France to parents from Guadeloupe, studied film in Moscow with Ousmane Sembène, and assisted Gillo Pontecorvo on *The Battle of Algiers* (1966). Shot in Congo, which stands in for Angola, *Sambizanga* follows a woman, Maria, searching for her husband, who's been arrested for his activism in the Angolan liberation struggle in the early 1960s. The woman is defiant and untiring. She carries her child on her back. Like Rosetta in the Dardennes' film, or Imamura's *Insect Woman*, she seems to have an engine within her. She never stops.

If some of the anticolonial Third Cinema films of the 70s feel preachy now, Maldoror's does not. She said, "I have no use for preachy militant films." Maybe that's why *Sambizanga* still feels open, and tender. Like Caravaggio, the director seems to love touch, and flickering light. Tenderness mixed with politics. It's a weird comparison, but the songs in the film are like those in John Ford's work: golden and about togetherness. Because of its visual beauty, variety of textures and affecting humanity, *Sambizanga* is a masterpiece.



Queen of the desert: Stephanie Rothman's *The Velvet Vampire* (1971)

➔ She's made other films – mostly shorts or docs – but this is the only one of hers I've managed to see. **Mark Cousins**

VIVRE ENSEMBLE

Anna Karina (France, 1973)

While recently producing a new Blu-ray release of Godard's *Vivre sa vie* (1962), I worked with the BFI National Archive on digitising one of their holdings – a somewhat damaged one-inch video recording of a long-unseen interview with Anna Karina from 1973. In it, she talks eloquently about her directorial debut, *Vivre ensemble*, which had evidently recently screened in London. Reportedly, *Vivre ensemble* is a drama that tells of the fraught relationship between a hippy girl, Julie (Anna Karina), and a rather uptight professor, Alain (Michel Lancelot), who descends into drug-addiction when he is introduced to the hedonistic milieu of Julie's friends. I say reportedly because, despite being warmly received upon release in France, *Vivre ensemble* has subsequently disappeared without trace, and has remained in almost total obscurity ever since. Karina's film has never been granted any kind of home-video release, and seems to be totally unavailable online in any bootlegged form. I had hoped to view the film and write about for this feature but, despite concerted efforts, I could not locate a copy anywhere. Hopefully, *Vivre ensemble* will resurface, as the little writing there is on this ultra-rare film testify to it being a thoughtful and touching directorial debut. **James Blackford**

YEAR OF THE WOMAN

Sandra Hochman (US, 1973)

In this personal experimental documentary about the women's liberation movement in 1972, poet Sandra Hochman brought recent NYU grads Claudia Weill (*Girlfriends*), Martha Coolidge (*Rambling Rose*), and Barbara Kopple (*Harlan County, USA*) to the Democratic National Convention in Florida. Utilising humour, fantasy, animation, poetry and theatrics, Hochman and her crew challenge the male establishment for ignoring the first meeting of the National Women's Political Caucus and Shirley Chisholm's bid for US vice-president. The film is also an excellent platform for Hochman's mentor and partner-in-crime, the undersung feminist heroine Flo Kennedy, and features notable appearances by Gloria Steinem, Bella Abzug, Warren Beatty and Norman Mailer. It is a fascinating and important part of documentary and feminist film history, which, due to complicated rights issues, has only ever screened a few times since its initial New York run and has only recently been made available to rent and buy on Vimeo. **Miriam Bale**

ONE WAY OR ANOTHER

Sara Gómez (Cuba, 1974)

One Way or Another (De cierta manera), a brilliant, highly pleasurable subversion of a Hollywood romantic drama, is Sara Gómez's only feature film, due to her tragic early death. It is a love story between Yolanda, a middle-class primary school teacher, who struggles to find the best methods

to teach the children of the poor neighbourhoods of Havana, and Mario, a worker at a bus factory and a typical macho man confronted by Yolanda's instinct for emancipation. The film (radically for its time) mixes documentary-style scenes with a fictional story in a complex portrait that looks at the poor areas of Havana shortly after the Cuban Revolution of 1959, demonstrating how demolishing slums and building modern developments does not immediately change the culture of the inhabitants. Posthumously released, this is a deeply disturbing, radical portrayal of patriarchy and male chauvinism from a pioneering figure of Cuban cinema. **Julie Pearce**

ADOPTION

Márta Mészáros (Hungary, 1975)

Mészáros is without doubt one of the most significant female directors from Central Europe, with the majority of her outspoken work dealing frankly with issues of gender, politics and society. I first saw her film *Adoption (Örökbefogadás)* in the late 70s. It is a story about the hushed rebellion of two strong women, one in her late forties and one in her teens, and is made without any hint of artifice; a film quiet and truthful in the best way, with no grand occurrences, no heavyweight discussions of issues, just eminently honest scenes. The film was awarded the Golden Bear at the 1975 Berlin Film Festival but, as with her renowned *Diary* films, has hardly been able to be seen in the West these past 40 years.

Mészáros insisted that she was not a feminist

filmmaker but that it was her duty to make films about women. Now in her mid-80s, she continues to work in film. **Mehelli Modi**

HESTER STREET

Joan Micklin Silver (US, 1975)

A mother of three before she was a filmmaker, Micklin Silver wrote and directed *Hester Street* with money raised by her husband – marriage as it should be! The film itself is a meticulously and lovingly realised tale of Jewish immigration into the Lower East Side at the end of the 19th century, the screenplay deriving from a novella by Abraham Cahan, a chronicler of the Jews who left Poland to settle in America. Micklin Silver takes great pains to deliver authenticity of idiom, tone and language. Evoking the photography of the period, the images are lovely: all dusty black-and-white chiaroscuro. The film is a deliciously warm wallow in Yiddish back-talk, verbal play, and the permutations and crises of assimilation. Star Carol Kane rightly drew an Academy Award nomination. **Adam Roberts**

KADDU BEYKAT

Safi Faye (Senegal, 1976)

With *Kaddu Beykat (Letter from My Village)*, Faye became the first sub-Saharan African woman to direct a feature-length film. She studied ethnology and film in France, and her initiation into cinema came with acting experience in films by French ethnographic filmmaker Jean Rouch.

JANE CAMPION ON...



A REAL YOUNG GIRL

Catherine Breillat (France, 1976)

I was really taken by *A Real Young Girl* as I had never seen anything so direct and honest about female sexuality. It could be mistaken for porn, but in my experience it was about truth, about the fact that women are truly, beautifully horny! It was a correction of the sex perception about women and because of it I felt

my coyness – and also respect for Catherine. She had transgressed the cultural understanding of girls and I think people felt affronted and shocked by the film [which was banned for 20 years in France and only released in 1999]. It's so daring for a debut. But Breillat's *Fat Girl* (2001) is an important other film – almost a companion piece, because it is touching and emotional but also surprising, about women and girls wanting to be wanted. **Jane Campion** 📺

The findings of the research she did among her own ethnic group, the Serer peasants in Senegal, inspired many of her films, including *Kaddu Beykat*, which is set in her family village, Fad'jal, and brings to the fore the central role women play within traditional village societies. The film commences and ends with a narrative voiceover in the form of a personal letter addressed to the villagers, and for the most part it follows, in slow pace, the close connection between the villagers' peasant lifestyle and the rhythms and fluctuations of their natural environment. The film could be best described as docu-fiction, and presents a unique way of storytelling through merging fiction and documentary filmmaking, experimental at the level of both content and narrative style. **Lizelle Bisschoff**

MIKEY AND NICKY

Elaine May (US, 1976)

May's *Ishtar* was considered such a terrible movie it became an easy put-down, even for those who'd never seen it – the movie is now enjoying a cult renaissance. For me, her classic is *A New Leaf* (1971) but *Mikey and Nicky* – another film plagued by bad reviews and production problems – is also a vastly underrated work. Poignant, angry, dark and wonderfully 'messy' in its rambling, ambling dialogue, it features two old gangster friends (the spectacular pairing of John Cassavetes and Peter Falk), who spend an evening together, talking, fighting, revisiting old memories and betrayals, all while Cassavetes fears Falk might be there to do him in. Long shaky camera sequences follow these actors through their intense dark night of the soul, resulting in a searing experience that now feels influential on everything from Quentin Tarantino's talking hit men in *Pulp Fiction* (1994) to Jon Favreau's small-timers arguing in *Made* (2001) which, not surprisingly, features Falk. **Kim Morgan**

THE SEALED SOIL

Marva Nabili, (Iran, 1977)

Long before Rakhshan Bani-Etemad's and Jafar Panahi's movies about Iranian women, Nabili (b. 1941) made *The Sealed Soil* (*Khake sar beh mahr*) based on a true story about a young woman's silent struggle for independence in a village in pre-revolution Iran. With its poetic tone, sparse dialogue and focus on its heroine's daily life, the film recalls Chantal Akerman's *Jeanne Dielman* (1975) but owes as much to Iranian director Sohrab Shahid Saless's films. After acting in Fereyoun Rahnema's acclaimed *Siavash in Persepolis* (1965), Nabili studied filmmaking in the UK and the US. Returning home, she secretly made *The Sealed Soil* on the eve of revolution, smuggled it out of Iran and completed it in the US. It was celebrated at a few film festivals but never screened in Iran. Nabili made her next film *Nightsongs* (1982) in the US, and that was the end of her career. **Hossein Eidizadeh**

LA NOUBA DES FEMMES DU MONT CHENOUA

Assia Djebbar (Algeria, 1978)

Algerian novelist, scholar, poet and filmmaker

GRETA GERWIG AND ALLISON ANDERS ON...



GIRLFRIENDS

Claudia Weill (US, 1978)

I'll never forget seeing Claudia's timeless, incredible movie in the theatres in 1978. It was the first time I had ever seen a female friendship presented in all its complexity: warmth, humour, sisterhood, competition, jealousy, longing, rage and absolute acceptance and trust. The fact that a woman had written and directed it was not lost on me: Claudia became a role model. A beacon.

Melanie Mayron and Anita Skinner are so beautifully cast as roommates Susan (a photographer) and Anne (a writer) who drift down different paths. When Anne gets married, Susan is left behind to create her life in the apartment they briefly shared. The journey of each woman is so unexpected and gorgeously real. Sexuality is treated so beautifully matter of fact. One scene with Christopher Guest and Mayron running playfully, naked in her apartment, and hugging each other nude, is one of the most romantic sex scenes I'd ever seen. So authentic.

Weill's framing and long takes, use of hallways and offscreen space was incredibly inspiring to me. I also love how the film doesn't need to trash the male characters to justify complicated choices made by Susan and Anne. Looking at it today, Claudia's work was so ahead of its time. And this film is deeply timeless. **Allison Anders**

When I saw *Girlfriends*, it felt like the film had been made just for me. I can't write about it in any analytical way, so here are just some pieces that I love. I use character names because that's how I think of them:

Susan's face, when she smiles, is filled with such sheer joy it makes me actually smile back. Painting the red wall by herself.

The way time jumps and then stalls.

When Susan goes to see the rabbi for what she thinks is an afternoon fling, she takes off her glasses. Then when he can't do it because his family is there, she hustles out of his office. Crying, she re-puts on her glasses.

How success doesn't come all at once, it's in fits and starts: "I'll never do another bar mitzvah or wedding!" Susan says. Later, of course, she photographs another wedding.

Even though she lies to get in to see the fancy art guy, he helps her out anyway. Her: "I really appreciate it." Him: "I know."

The two gallerists both wearing never-explained neck braces.

When you're young, you don't know what in your life will turn out to be a lark and what will become something solid.

The amount of time we get to be alone with our heroine.

The last shot, when Anne's husband comes home. Even though she's sitting there making fun of him with her old friend, she still gets up and leaves Susan alone when he calls her name. **Greta Gerwig** 🍷

Assia Djebbar (1936-2015) is one of North Africa's best-known and most widely acclaimed writers. Her experimental semi-autobiographical docu-fiction film *La Noubia*, completed in 1978, provides a platform for the marginalised and repressed stories of Algerian women's experiences during and after the Algerian War. The film takes its title from the 'Nouba', a traditional song in five movements. Through a lyrical structure which moves away from chronological narrative filmmaking, the film

mingles fiction and documentary styles to retell and document women's personal and cultural histories. Djebbar's observational camera captures intimate female-centred moments, domestic spaces and scenes of the natural environment through the eyes of the main female protagonist, Lila. *La Noubia* was a groundbreaking Algerian film at the time it was released, unique in the milieu of a national cinema which did not represent women's stories. **Lizelle Bisschoff**



Twisted sisters: *The Mafu Cage* (1977), a rare theatrical outing for TV director Karen Arthur

BLOODY-MINDED WOMEN

For years typecast in horror films as victims and scream queens, women are moving behind the camera in ever-increasing numbers. **By Virginie Sélavy**

The dearth of female directors in the horror genre has been the subject of much discussion in recent years. Yet horror has offered a route – albeit imperfect and at times fraught – into filmmaking for women who would never have been given a chance to direct in the conservative, and equally male-dominated, mainstream industry.

Despite the pioneering work of Leni Riefenstahl and Ida Lupino (each with a witch tale – respectively 1932's mystical mountain-set *The Blue Light*, and the beautifully atmospheric *La Strega*, made for Boris Karloff's *Thriller* TV series in 1962), it was only in the 1970s that a significant number of women began to direct horror. From making nudie pictures in the 1960s, sexploitation queen Doris Wishman progressed to gritty rape-revenge with 1965's *Bad Girls Go to Hell*. In 1976 she experimented with a porn-horror hybrid, *Come with Me My Love*, before switching fully to the genre in 1983 with the slasher *A Night to Dismember*.

Just as unique and strong-minded, Roberta Findlay contributed to her husband Michael's sadistic sex films in the 1960s. In 1971, the couple made *Slaughter*, a low-budget film about a murderous cult, which became the hugely notorious and influential *Snuff* after it was recut and rereleased in 1976 by producer Allan Shackleton.

Roger Corman's New World Pictures produced movies that exploited female nudity, but also fostered female talent behind the camera. The first woman to direct for Corman was Stephanie Rothman, with the

Roger Corman produced movies that exploited female nudity, but also fostered female talent behind the camera

commercially successful *The Student Nurses* in 1970 and *The Velvet Vampire* in 1971. Barbara Peeters followed with the female-led biker film *Bury Me an Angel* (1971). Peeters is best known for the horror sci-fi *Humanoids from the Deep* (1980) – though Corman later added explicit rape scenes without consulting her.

Neither Peeters nor Rothman went on to find fame in Hollywood, as so many male Corman alumni did – Francis Ford Coppola, Martin Scorsese and James Cameron among them. But Gale Anne Hurd, production assistant on *Humanoids from the Deep*, went on to produce *The Terminator* (1984) and *Aliens* (1986), and has most recently been an executive producer on the TV zombie drama *The Walking Dead*.

Two more slices of singular strangeness must be mentioned: the creepy, dreamlike and ambiguously paranoid *Messiah of Evil* (1972), co-directed by *American Graffiti* writers Gloria Katz and husband Willard Huyck; and psychotic sister horror *The Mafu Cage* (1977), a rare theatrical outing for TV director Karen Arthur.

Following these trailblazers, further waves of women have created intelligent, dark, disturbing work, among them Kathryn Bigelow (the vampire western *Near Dark*, 1987), Lynne Stopkewich (necrophiliac romance *Kissed*, 1996), Antonia Bird (cannibal black comedy *Ravenous*, 1999), Claire Denis (erotic horror *Trouble Every Day*, 2001), Ann Hui (ghost comedy *Visible Secret*, 2001) and Marina de Van (self-mutilation drama *In My Skin*, 2002). Lately, there has been a surge of outstanding female-directed films, most notably Jennifer Kent's *The Babadook* (2013), Ana Lily Amirpour's *A Girl Walks Home Alone at Night* (2014), and Jen and Sylvia Soska's *American Mary* (2012), while Axelle Carolyn, Elisabeth Fies and Leigh Janiak are names to watch. It looks as though horror is a female-friendly genre after all, not just about final girls but final-cut queens. **S**



THE CUENCA CRIME

Pilar Miró (Spain, 1979)

A day before the release of *The Cuenca Crime* (*El crimen de Cuenca*), a film by one of the most influential and emblematic figures in the Spanish film industry, its licence was removed and all copies confiscated apart from one, which was shown at the Berlinale. At a time of political transition and turmoil in Spain, the film was always going to be polemical. Based on documented historical facts about the apparent murder of a shepherd in 1910, Miró's extraordinary film depicts – in gruesome detail – members of the Civil Guard savagely torturing the two men incriminated by the shepherd's widow, in order to get a confession. Some 16 years later, the shepherd reappeared, alive.

Accused of slander against the Civil Guard, Miró was prosecuted by a military tribunal, which asked for six years in prison; she had to show up at the military's offices every fortnight for a year until the full trial was abandoned. *The Cuenca Crime*, the only film to be banned in Spain during the democratic era, was finally released a year and a half later. **Mar Diestro-Dópidio**

THE SONG OF THE SHIRT

Sue Clayton & Jonathan Curling (UK, 1979)

The Song of the Shirt emerged from the same UK independent filmmaking scene that produced Laura Mulvey and Peter Wollen's *Riddles of the Sphinx* (1977). Happily, the BFI rereleased *Riddles* on DVD in 2013; sadly, the only way you can currently see *Song* is by visiting the archives. Part drama, part documentary, *Song* tells the story of the women who worked in Victorian London's clothing sweatshops, eschewing a conventional narrative in favour of a series of still photographs and acted reconstructions to show that this story has been rewritten/written-over many times before. The multi-textured, stitched-together look of the film reflects the textile theme ingeniously – as does the incredible soundtrack by Lindsay Cooper, co-founder of the Feminist Improvising Group, of which Sally Potter was a member. Overtly feminist, socialist and experimental, *Song* is a reminder of the radical potential of film. Now almost 40 years old, its subject well over 100, it remains as innovative and relevant as ever. **Anna Coatman**

DEMON LOVER DIARY

Joel DeMott (US, 1980)

"This is my boyfriend Jeff," are among the first words spoken by Joel DeMott in her uproarious *Demon Lover Diary*, her catty narration delivered as we watch her dopey significant other Jeff Kreines looking a bit like a deer in headlights. It's an ironic enough beginning for a movie made by a woman that so deftly skewers the bloated male ego. Life partners DeMott and Kreines would go on to co-direct the seminal observational film *Seventeen* (1983), but here she is documenter and he is among her funnier-than-fictional onscreen subjects. Filmed in 1975, originally released in 1980 and virtually lost until someone posted a work print on the internet in the early noughties,

Demon Lover Diary chronicles the too-dumb-to-be-real making-of story of low-budget horror flick *Demon Lover* by factory-workers-turned-would-be-schlockmasters Don Jackson and Jerry Younkens. The film has been aptly called the proto-*American Movie* (1999), but from its clear-eyed intimacy to its frenetic, semi-paranoid climax, it's a distinct work of no-budget brilliance. **Robert Greene**

LITTLE IDA

Laila Mikkelsen, (Norway, 1981)

Adapted by Marit Paulsen from her semi-autobiographical novel in collaboration with the director, *Little Ida* looks at the last year of the German occupation of Norway through the puzzled eyes of a seven-year-old girl whose mother, a sad, faded beauty, cooks in a German prison camp kitchen in the far north and has an affair with an SS officer. Sunniva Lindekleiv gives a heartrending performance as the tragic innocent Ida, a victim of historical circumstance, ostracised by her fellow pupils and their parents in a film of subtle, but often brutal observation. There is scarcely a touch of sentimentality in a movie that is one of the best, least judgemental treatments of fraternisation with the enemy during WWII and the terrible revenge taken by those involved at the end of hostilities. **Philip French**

THE LOVELESS

Kathryn Bigelow & Monty Montgomery (US, 1981)

A graduate in fine art and film studies, Kathryn

Bigelow wrote and directed her stylised, colour-saturated first feature with Monty Montgomery. *The Loveless* was both the last of the juvenile delinquent/rebel biker movies of the 1950s-70s and among the first of the 1980s-90s arthouse cool school that would include *Rumblefish*, and the break-out films of John Waters, David Lynch, Gus van Sant and *le cinéma du look*.

All black leather and chrome, Dixie and Thunderbird, snarling dialogue and themes of Nowheresville violence, ennui and sexual corruption, *The Loveless* is fully appreciative of the male form with its *Scorpio Rising*-style crotch shots and casting of Willem Dafoe (channeling Brando and James Dean; butt-naked in a memorable scene) and rockabilly musician Robert Gordon, who also provided the film's fabulous soundtrack.

There is no other female director like Bigelow, whose films over the following decade were *Near Dark* (1987), *Blue Steel* (1989) and *Point Break* (1991). **Jane Giles**

THE SKIN

Liliana Cavani (Italy, 1981)

In a career spanning more than 50 years, the Italian director Liliana Cavani has made several films on WWII, including pioneering TV documentaries such as *History of the Third Reich* (1963-64) and *Women of the Resistance* (1965), as well as controversial, morally complex features such as *The Night Porter* (1973) and *The Skin*. The latter, based on a 1949 novel by Curzio Malaparte and starring acting royalty Marcello Mastroianni, Claudia Cardinale and Burt Lancaster, deserves to

be far better known. Set in Naples in 1944, *The Skin* is an eye-poppingly frank, frequently harrowing chronicle of the liberation of Italy by the Allied forces. Comparable to Sam Peckinpah's *Cross of Iron* (1977) in its unsentimental view of war, the focus in Cavani's film is less on the battlefield and more on the devastating impact of conflict on the civilian population. **Pasquale Iannone**

36 CHOWRINGHEE LANE

Aparna Sen (India, 1981)

Indian female directors can be counted on one hand and Aparna Sen is one of these rare few. She started her career at 16 when she was cast in Satyajit Ray's *Teen Kanya* (1961), and her appealing screen presence and raw talent ensured her a long career in Bengali cinema. At 36, she wrote and directed her first film, *36 Chowringhee Lane*, the melancholic story of Violet Stoneham (played brilliantly by Jennifer Kendal), a 60-year-old retired Anglo-Indian schoolteacher who lives in a one-bed flat on Chowringhee Lane in Calcutta. Without family or friends, she has to rely on a cat and a self-serving former student for company. Produced by the Hindi star Shashi Kapoor, *36 Chowringhee Lane* is a small gem that tells of loneliness and old age. It was highly acclaimed at the time of its release, winning a clutch of awards, but has since fallen from public view. **Nasreen Munni Kabir**

WILL

Jessie Maple (US, 1981)

The pioneering Jessie Maple was the first African-American woman to gain entry to New York's camera operators' union. She took the case to court to fight discrimination after becoming a member, and wrote a book documenting her life and experience, *How to Become a Union Camera Woman*. Maple made her feature debut in 1981 with the Harlem-set drama *Will*, on a budget of just \$12,000. Shot on vibrant, grainy 16mm, it tells the story of a heroin-addicted basketball coach and his wife, who adopt a troubled 12-year-old homeless boy. It's rough around the edges, but wryly funny, well acted and extremely moving, plus a valuable time capsule of its rapidly gentrifying locations. In need of a venue to premiere *Will*, Maple and her cinematographer husband Leroy Patton built and founded the independent cinema 20 West in Harlem, which stayed open for nine years. Maple and Patton remain an item today, still working on projects together. **Ashley Clark**

LOSING GROUND

Kathleen Collins (US, 1982)

It took visionary audacity for Kathleen Collins to call her debut feature – one of the first by a black female director – *Losing Ground*, but the movie's overwhelming artistic energy is matched by its bitter ironies. It's centred on a New York couple, Sarah (Seret Scott), a young philosophy professor studying ecstatic experience, and Victor (Bill Gunn), a middle-aged artist trading his success with abstraction for life studies. Collins's sun-splashed, highly textured images

LONE SCHERFIG ON...



THE GERMAN SISTERS

Margarethe von Trotta (West Germany, 1981)

The German Sisters (aka *Marianne and Juliane*) was dedicated to the sister of Gudrun Ensslin, one of the founders of the German left-wing militant group the Red Army Faction. It was released in the same year I began film school and it had a huge impact on me. It is a highly intelligent and profound story set against the politics of Cold War West Germany, but is

as meaningful and poignant today as it was when it was made. The intellectual older sister Juliane fights her political battles through her journalism, while her little sister Marianne chooses militant extremism with a violent revolutionary group. The film contains one of the most unforgottably moving yet simple scenes in cinema: Juliane visits her terrorist sister in jail, and in a gesture of affection she swaps her warmer sweater with her freezing little sister's. **Lone Scherfig** 🍷

are painterly, her emotional realm is ecstatic, and – with its close, naturalistic examination of the contours of a fracturing marriage – her conception is passionately symbolic, culminating in a tribute to the intimately revelatory power of the cinema itself. Herself a civil-rights activist and a literary scholar, Collins found agonised stresses of black culture, history and identity – and of women's romantic and professional relationships with men – in lives that seemed to have overcome the worst of discriminations. With its painfully insightful private dramas, Collins's film embraces a grand spectrum of experience; its non-release is an enduring tragedy, because its inspirational power should have marked its time. **Richard Brody**

A QUESTION OF SILENCE

Marleen Gorris (Netherlands, 1982)

Hugely controversial (with men) at the time of its release but now rarely seen, Gorris's first feature deals with the lead-up to and consequences of a seemingly unprovoked killing of a male boutique owner by three women who were previously unknown to each other. We come to understand the unconscious political and social forces, as opposed to conventional motive, that lead to the incident during the course of the investigation, which is led by a female psychologist. By the end, she resolutely stands by the women, rejecting claims that they are insane in the face of massive establishment protest and assertions that madness can be the only explanation for such an act. The film boldly tackles deeply held cultural assumptions around heterosexuality and gender imbalance, women's status and visibility in society, and masculine rationality. It privileges violence, anger, silence and laughter as tools for tackling patriarchy from a distinctly female perspective, seeing conventional dialogue as having its own ideological pitfalls. The male characters are shown to have no understanding of their own power, nor how they ignorantly apply it. **Helen DeWitt**

THE SLUMBER PARTY MASSACRE

Amy Holden Jones (US, 1982)

Scripted by feminist novelist Rita Mae Brown as a satire on the *Halloween* variety of slasher movie, and directed by former editor Amy Jones under the aegis of exploitation producer Roger Corman, *The Slumber Party Massacre* is an archetypal low-budget horror film of its period – fluffy-haired teenagers hang out at a slumber party and are menaced by a glaring-eyed driller killer. There are a few table-turning jokes, such as the moment the heroine lops off the phallic bit of the appalled villain's power tool, but it's mostly an unassuming genre exercise with a nice sense of humour and a matter-of-fact suburban setting. Sequels ensued – uniquely, this is the only slasher franchise exclusively written and directed by women: writer-director Deborah Brock made *Slumber Party Massacre II* (1987), with its memorable guitar-drill ghost rockabilly villain, while Sally Mattison and Catherine Cyran finished things off with *Slumber Party Massacre III* (1990). **Kim Newman**

SUGAR CANE ALLEY

Euzhan Palcy (France/Martinique, 1983)

In 1930s Martinique a grandmother desires to save her gifted grandson José from a life cutting sugar cane. Though slavery has been abolished almost 100 years previously, women, men and children all work in plantation fields. By adapting Joseph Zobel's autobiographical 1950 novel *La Rue Cases-Nègres*, Palcy, a native of Martinique herself, does with cinema what his book and the literature of Aimé Césaire and Edouard Glissant had done masterfully and poetically: pull Martinique out of the obscurity and opacity imposed by years of colonialism. It is through José's eyes that we see the aftermath of French slavery, how it organises life and how it can determine the destiny of one individual and its community. The film's child cast, led by Garry Cadenat, shows a peculiar maturity. French cinema has ignored (and still ignores) Caribbean life. What stands out in Palcy's film is the illumination of a forgotten community, the landscapes in which its people navigate, their language, their desires and dreams. **Fanta Sylla**

ANGRY HARVEST

Agnieszka Holland (West Germany, 1985)

In Poland toward the end of WWII, a farmer (Armin Mueller-Stahl) finds a woman (Elisabeth Trissenaar) alone, wrapped in a fur coat, and starving in the woods. She has escaped from a train carrying Jews to extermination camps. On impulse – part pity, part lust – he hides her in his basement, but her presence causes his inchoate misogyny, class resentment and anti-semitism to surface, wrapped in fear, self-hatred, alcoholism and religiosity. The woman accepts his crude sexual assaults, but not his attempt to save her soul by converting her to Catholicism. With understated irony, she confronts his hatred of her Jewishness; her refusal of the Resurrection casts doubt on his belief that he will be saved. *Angry Harvest* is Holland's toughest film – and that includes her *A Woman Alone* (1981) – but despite the horror of her characters' circumstances and actions, she allows us to view them with compassion. **Amy Taubin**

DESERT HEARTS

Donna Deitch (US, 1985)

Although it has become a cult classic due to its



Donna Deitch's *Desert Hearts* (1985)

explicit lesbian sex, *Desert Hearts* is a wonderfully well-made film with a host of appealing attributes. Steeped in moody, classic country and western music, it conveys romantic longing and confusion with bittersweet intensity. The casting is superb, starting with Helen Shaver as a primly proper New York professor and Patricia Charbonneau as a charismatic Reno cowgirl, but also extending to a riveting supporting cast, who do humorous, sharply observed vignettes across the spectrum of social class. Crisply edited subplots are effortlessly woven throughout. The gritty, monotonous sense of place is accentuated by Shaver's endearing disorientation in wide-open Nevada. The film has a beguilingly hypnotic atmosphere, like Shakespeare's magical green world, where things change shape and identities are transformed. As we contemplate the aching degrees and varieties of love, we must laugh at the eternal muddle of human aspiration and absurdity. With neither cynicism nor sentimentality, *Desert Hearts* charmingly asserts the centrality of emotion, as well as its prankish surprises. **Camille Paglia**

HOOR OF THE STAR

Suzana Amaral (Brazil, 1985)

Hour of the Star (*A hora da estrela*) was Brazilian director Suzana Amaral's first film, made when she was in her fifties. It is an adaptation of Clarice Lispector's final novel, an ambitious project for any director. The author, in the form of a narrator called Rodrigo S.M., wonders at length how the story of Macabéa, a naive young typist from a poor region of northern Brazil working in Rio, should be told, examining the "sparse and mundane" subject matter from multiple angles. Amaral's film presents only the meagre story, not its shifting perspectives nor its more philosophical dimensions. But she presents it confidently, fleshing out characters and particularly locations: Macabéa's dark office and cramped lodgings, and the streets, subways and parks of Rio, where she drifts through dates with her irritable boyfriend Olímpico. Marcélia Cartaxo won awards for her performance as Macabéa, and *Hour of the Star* works best when it's in her subdued register. Only the ending really jars, as the film becomes a detached, somewhat prurient portrait of poor lives, rather than asking, as the book does, how poverty shapes imagination. **Frances Morgan**

ORIANA

Fina Torres (Venezuela, 1985)

Winner of the Caméra d'Or at Cannes in 1985, *Oriana* is a complex interwoven story, told like those small Chinese boxes that open only to reveal more and more layers. María is a woman who returns to Venezuela from France in order to sell the family estate. Once there, she starts unearthing the story of the house's owner, her aunt Oriana, through photographs and memories that come back to her, leading her toward a tragedy in Oriana's past. Through the use of *mise en abyme*, Torres starts assembling flashback within flashback in order to reach a moment when the family fractures as the result of a forbidden love, whose consequences can be



Razing cane: Euzhan Palcy's *Sugar Cane Alley* (1983)

traced to the present. By means of the characters and the narrative's flashback structure, the film questions how marginalisation – as a result of race, gender, social class – occurs throughout history under a patriarchal system. **Diego Lerer**

VERTIGES

Christine Laurent (France, 1985)

Despite being better known as an actress and screenwriter, Christine Laurent is also the director of six films which achieved little international distribution, and are not even available on DVD in France; I was only able to see *Vertiges*, her second feature, thanks to a Channel 4 screening in the 90s. Given that *Vertiges* focuses on several individuals rehearsing a production of Mozart's *The Marriage of Figaro*, with onstage activities reflecting offstage relationships, it is easy to see why Laurent attracted Jacques Rivette as a collaborator (she has co-written all but one of his films since 1988). But if Rivette tends to push this mirroring of fictional and real worlds in the direction of paranoia, Laurent is more interested in mourning lost performative opportunities. Her yearning for less rigidly defined gender roles gives this elusive masterpiece a haunting atmosphere of sadness and regret that suggests the presence of a major filmmaker. **Brad Stevens**

THE BLACK DOG

Alison de Vere (UK, 1987)

A contemporary of animator and designer Alison de Vere described her masterpiece *The Black Dog* as an advance in the art of animation in the way that *The Marriage of Figaro* was for opera. What makes the film all the more extraordinary is that it was released as she was turning 60, with 35 successful years in a difficult industry (especially for women) under her belt, and another decade to come.

Over the course of 20 minutes this rich, symbolic, intensely personal yet universal film

wordlessly follows the path of a woman on a journey of self-discovery. Exotic hieroglyphic-style creatures populate a treacherous landscape in which the pinnacles and pitfalls of an independent life are richly portrayed. That the film is not better known is probably due more to the ghetto status of short 'grown-up' animation than its creator's gender. Yet it is a work of rewarding depth, which is long overdue further attention. **Jez Stewart**

PESTONJEE

Vijaya Mehta (India, 1987)

Vijaya Mehta (b. 1934) played a major role in Marathi experimental theatre in Bombay in the 1960s. She has directed two films, one of which, *Pestonjee*, won the 1987 National Award for the Best Feature Film in Hindi.

The film focuses on the emotional repression and subsequent disappointed life of Pirojshah (Naseeruddin Shah), who falls in love with beautiful Jeroo (Shabana Azmi), but instead marries his close friend Pestonjee (Anupam Kher). Pirojshah leaves the city, returning to find Jeroo aged and bitter, but blames Pestonjee who has found love and a family with his mistress. A slow theatrical film, it has been mostly valued for its beautifully evoked fading world of Bombay's Parsi (Zoroastrian) community, but less attention has been given to its portrayal of the emotional world of the two men. **Rachel Dwyer**

WOMAN DEMON HUMAN

Huang Shuqin (China, 1987).

A 'Fourth Generation' filmmaker, Huang Shuqin (b. 1939) had to wait until the end of the Cultural Revolution to be allowed to direct. Hailed as the first feminist film in China, *Woman Demon Human* (*Ren gui qing*) was overshadowed by the Fifth Generation films of Chen Kaige and Zhang Yimou, which stole the limelight. Respected in

China, Huang is also perceived as the middle link in a prestigious dynasty of Shanghai filmmakers. Her father, Huang Zuolin (1906-1994), originally a stage and opera director, directed such landmark films as *Phony Phoenixes* (*Jiafeng xuhuang*, 1947) and *The Watch* (*Biao*, 1949). Her son, Zheng Dasheng, authored an award-winning documentary and several art films. No wonder that, in her most accomplished and resonant work, she expresses the plight of an exceptionally gifted young woman (patterned after the real-life opera singer Pei Yanling) who strives, in a performing art world dominated by men (her father, her teacher, her inconsequential husband), to accomplish her dream: playing on stage, in full opera make-up, the role of the benevolent (male) demon Zhong Kui. Femininity as double masquerade, indeed... **Bérénice Reynaud**

CELIA

Ann Turner (Australia, 1989)

Brilliant, dark and singular in its vision, Ann Turner's *Celia* remains one of the most fascinating and visceral films about girlhood. Set in conservative, Cold War Australia in the 50s, the film parallels the government's response to a virulent rabbit plague with the communist witch hunts, playing out these broader social tensions in the violent, ritualised, secret world of children. The film – about nine-year-old Celia, whose beloved granny has just died and who is obsessed with storybook monsters and getting a pet bunny – defies easy categorisation (one of the reasons its release was botched in most territories). Part-horror, part grim fairytale, it explores girlhood at the threshold of sexual and moral awareness. It premiered in 1989, the same year as Jane Campion's first feature *Sweetie*, and my first year of film studies. I still find it wholly distinctive and more deliciously ambiguous than the two films it was compared with at the time – Francois Truffaut's *The 400 Blows* and Peter Brook's *Lord of the Flies*. **Clare Stewart**

PET SEMATARY

Mary Lambert (US, 1989)

Mary Lambert was best known for her early Madonna videos when she directed *Pet Sematary*, adapted from his own novel by Stephen King and set in his habitual stamping ground of rural Maine. Absent are the auteurial gloss of the most celebrated King adaptations, and the arty pretensions of Lambert's feature debut *Siesta*, dismissed as a confused mess in 1987 but looking in retrospect like an outlier of the they-were-dead-all-along trope.

Instead, *Pet Sematary* settles for B-movie casting and unabashed horror, drawing its narrative force from emotionally painful themes that a genre untrammelled by notions of good taste often explores more honestly than mainstream drama – disease, death and bereavement, topped off with a *Monkey's Paw*-style kicker. Lambert goes straight for the jugular, delivering not just the requisite shocks, violent death and walking corpses, but a mounting sense of dread as its protagonist resolves to bring his dead child back to life, no matter what the cost. **Anne Billson**



MIRROR MIRROR

Marina Sargenti (US, 1990)

Mirror Mirror is a little-known 'indie' gem by someone who has since worked mainly in television. The presence of Karen Black and Yvonne De Carlo in the cast may suggest camp parody of the horror genre, but Sargenti clearly has more serious business on her mind.

This tale of a righteously vengeful teenager (played by Rainbow Harvest) controlling and being controlled by demonic powers recalls Brian De Palma's classic *Carrie* (1976). At the same time, it leans toward avant-garde cinema's reworking of female gothic tropes, as first immortalised by Maya Deren in *Meshes of the Afternoon* (1943).

Mirror Mirror is visceral, energetic, hallucinatory and, by the end, fantastically incoherent. How could it be otherwise? Generating florid psychodrama from the symbolism of mirrors – narcissism, split identity, the beast on the other side of the glass – it plumbs the daily lurking terrors of patriarchy. **Adrian Martin**

DAUGHTERS OF THE DUST

Julie Dash (US, 1991)

Julie Dash's feature *Daughters of the Dust* centres on a matriarchal family in the Sea Islands of South Carolina in 1902 as they make the tough decision about whether to migrate to the American 'mainland' or remain on their ancestral land. This land, sometimes known as the 'Ellis Island for Africans' during the



On the edge: Allison Anders's *Gas Food Lodging* (1992)

slave trade, contains memory and history that connects them to their Gullah traditions. But these are tested when daughter Viola Peazant returns from Philadelphia with the word of Christ, while family matriarch Nana Peazant refuses to leave the land, and her daughter-in-law Eula suffers the trauma of a past sexual assault, and is undecided. Drawing on West African folklore and oral traditions, the film ruptures the three-act film structure and challenges cinema's tendency of having a

single protagonist, utilising the voiceover of Eula's unborn child to frame the narrative.

Dash captures the nuances of black womanhood in a natural environment – against rolling shores, backed by sprawling nature, in white dresses, with natural hair. The film stands as a landmark achievement not only in black cinema, but in independent cinema generally. **Nijla Mu'min**

THE PARTY: NATURE MORTE

Cynthia Beatt (Germany, 1991)

This hypnotically beautiful film is the work of Berlin-based director Cynthia Beatt, who shot it in 15 days, on a tiny budget, shortly after the fall of the Wall. The eponymous party is hosted by Queenie and Burrs, long-term lovers who are rapidly growing apart. The tension between them is palpable as they interact with an intriguing array of guests (Fassbinder veteran Irm Hermann and actor-composer Simon Fisher Turner provide witty cameos). But what makes it all so spellbinding is the exquisitely nuanced, physically expressive performance of a young Tilda Swinton as Queenie. Whether absorbed by music, dreamily recalling a favourite poem or dancing seductively with a stranger, she invests the character with complex inner life. All this unfolds in ravishing black and white, courtesy of Elfi Mikesch, one of Germany's finest cinematographers and herself a director of note. Her expressionistic lighting and sinuous camera movements evoke the glamour and shadowy menace of Weimar cinema. **Margaret Deriaz**

PROOF

Jocelyn Moorhouse (Australia, 1991)

Singularity and clarity of vision mark out Jocelyn Moorhouse's slyly humorous character study as a durable and list-worthy debut. A sense of timelessness pervades her exploration of the shifting ground of perception and illusion, in which the longing and mistrust of the past corrupt the reality of the present. Blind from

CLAIRE DENIS ON...



AN ANGEL AT MY TABLE

Jane Campion (New Zealand/Australia/UK, 1990)

This is not only a great film by a great director – of course, there could never be any doubt about that – but for the first time I felt there was a film that could only have been made by a woman, this woman. And not only as a filmmaker but woman as a whole, brave, brave

as a human can be. This is not a film about a brave woman's tormented heroic destiny... No, it has something deeper, more urgent to declare about films and women. This film changed my life as a woman, not simply as a filmmaker.

Nobody had made images of girls and landscapes that beautiful before, with such a vibrating intuition for life. I will savour forever the closing image of Kerry Fox dancing the twist in the garden at night-time. **Claire Denis** 🍷

birth, Martin takes photographs to help him see. Independent and abrasive, he is caught in a relationship of mutual animosity with his housekeeper Celia, who also desires him. He rebuffs and humiliates her; she torments him with petty aggravations in return. When he befriends a younger man, who seems guileless but proves himself feckless, Celia's retaliation takes a more calculated turn. Directing from her own script, Moorhouse escalates comedy as skilfully as she builds tension, confounding expectation and skewering sentimentality. Her controlled direction extends to her graceful technical choices, bringing us close to Martin's experience while holding enough distance to allow that his 'proof' might be anything but. **Sandra Hebron**

QUEEN OF DIAMONDS

Nina Menkes (US, 1991)

Nina Menkes holds a distinctive but overlooked position in American independent cinema. Her provocative and visually arresting art films hover between experimental and narrative, fearlessly exploring the alienated feminine, the subconscious and violent patriarchal outer realities. "For me, cinema is sorcery, a creative way to interact with the world in order to rearrange perception and expand consciousness, both the viewers and my own."

Queen of Diamonds is one of four significant films she completed with her collaborator and sister Tinka Menkes from 1983-96. Set in Las Vegas, Tinka plays Firdaus (an Arabic word for 'paradise'), a blackjack dealer. This solitary young woman glides through her daytime existence with a heightened sense of isolation and ennui. A single eight-minute take of a burning palm tree is mesmerising; Menkes's aesthetic combines Baudrillard's notion of the hyperreal with Akerman's fierce feminist social critique. **Selina Robertson**

GAS FOOD LODGING

Allison Anders (US, 1992)

Gas Food Lodging opened as the fight was on to get Democrat Bill Clinton elected after more than a decade of Ronald Reagan and George Bush, Sr in the White House. Allison Anders, in her standalone debut as a director and writer, took a sledgehammer to Reaganite sensibilities and showed women who were living on the edge – and in doing so placed herself in the vanguard of the indie wave of the 90s. What made her stand out at that moment is that she made brutally real movies about women. About single mums. About the working class. About rape. About abandonment.

Rewatching the film so many years later you see a heartbreaking performance from Ione Skye as the rebellious Trudi, so disappointed by everyone and everything, especially men, that she almost gives up. And there was Fairuza Balk as Shade, desperately seeking the father who left and who just didn't fit in anywhere except at the movies. And Brooke Adams (how come we didn't see more of her?) gave us a portrait of a woman whose everyday life is a struggle to make ends meet and to keep her daughters

safe. Throughout her film career, Anders has brought her tough personal experiences to the screen and challenged audiences to see women in new ways – a legacy directors continue to build on today. **Melissa Silverstein**

POISON IVY

Katt Shea (US, 1992)

Getting the sensibility right when making a swoonily tacky B movie shocker is a task that has eluded many. New Line wanted "a teenage *Fatal Attraction*". They hired Shea off the back of four Roger Corman exploitation pieces. The script grew more Hitchcocko-Freudian. The ace card was getting 17-year-old Drew Barrymore to play the eponymous Ivy, who befriends our point-of-view heroine Sara Gilbert – then a major TV star playing Roseanne's nerdy daughter Darlene – and moves in on the suicidal mom (Cheryl Ladd) and stressed-out dad (Tom Skerritt). Barrymore's always most immaculate when about to do the most psychotic things. She looms in the background, often out of focus, and can be very alarming. The whole confection is exquisitely LA. Atom Egoyan went for something like it with *Chloe* (2009), but his instincts are not as refined for this material as Shea's. **Nick James**

WILDWOOD, NJ

Ruth Leitman & Carol Weakas Cassidy (US, 1992)

Wildwood, New Jersey has long been the home of an annual summer migration for hundreds of thousands of holidaymakers heading to the beach. In 1992, Leitman and Cassidy, and an all-woman crew, spent a summer with the girls of Wildwood. Through the gorgeous sun-kissed pastel tones of their Super 8 camera, they take us on to the boardwalk, home to big hair, stonewash denim and sass. A collage of interviews lets us

experience these girls' summer flings, dreams, friendships and fistfights, brilliantly interspersed with an older generation reminiscing about their own adolescent adventures and chastising the younger. Preceding its better-known reality TV counterpart, Leitman and Cassidy's film is a testament to the beauty of simplicity, capturing a moment in time. This portrait of youthful abandon and the magic of a summer was recently brought out of obscurity, 20 years after its initial release, after clips posted online went viral, creating a new fanbase, including singer Lana Del Rey who appropriated its images for one of her videos. **Charlotte Cook**

PRIEST

Antonia Bird (UK, 1994)

Bird's emotionally intelligent account of a gay priest confronting the contradictions of celibacy and the confessional was equally celebrated and reviled on its release. Castigated by offended Catholics yet feted at Berlin and Toronto, *Priest* rewards re-viewing – particularly in the wake of this brilliant director's too-early passing in 2013. Its tender vision of developing love between Father Greg Pilkington (Linus Roache) and bar pick-up Graham (Robert Carlyle) set a frank precedent for burgeoning British queer cinema: in one ecstatic revolving shot the lovers kiss passionately on a wide empty beach, reinventing chilly Liverpool as a place of unguarded erotic romance. But this brief utopia is embedded in darker urban disquiet (the child abuse storyline remains shocking, though now sadly more familiar). Despite the soapboxing of Jimmy McGovern's script – the one element of *Priest* which has dated – Bird maintains the nuanced class politics she developed across her work through character, performance, location. **Linda Ruth Williams**



Bad trip: Ngozi Onwurah's *Welcome II the Terrordome* (1995)

THE SILENCES OF THE PALACE

Moufida Tlatli (Tunisia/France, 1994)

The first Arab film directed by a woman, Tlatli's plaintive post-colonial melodrama won first-film awards from London to Cannes; *Time* named it one of the top ten films of 1994 and Laura Mulvey interviewed its maker for this magazine – so if it belongs in this inventory, it's as another case of how movies' reputations can dim when not maintained by the currencies of privilege. Tlatli, one of North Africa's most eminent film editors for the two decades prior to this, has directed only two films since, although she also served a brief stint as Tunisia's minister of culture after the 2011 Jasmine Revolution. Ironically the experience of revolution and its frustrations is the story of *The Silences of the Palace*, which distills the country's mid-century struggles for emancipation through the coming to womanhood of a scion of the country's royal-servant class – and her reflections from a less than gloriously liberated adulthood on the legacy of oppression, abuse and fear that patriarchy impresses down the generations. Nuanced and sharp-sighted, it's a masterfully affecting work. **Nick Bradshaw**

CARMEN MIRANDA: BANANAS IS MY BUSINESS

Helena Solberg (Brazil, 1995)

The only female filmmaker of Brazil's *cinema novo* frequently makes films that explore her country's identity and the lives of Latin women. Helen Solberg's documentary follows the career of one of Brazil's most popular singers, against the political landscape of the Cold War. Born in Portugal and raised in Rio, Miranda found fame in Hollywood's star system of the 1940s, but was rejected by Brazilian elites, who saw her as too populist and Americanised. The film opens with Miranda's death from a heart attack and loops back to the beginning, narrating chronologically her skyrocketing success, from her first happy years in America and on to a rocky marriage. Solberg, who provides the voiceover, weaves impressionist re-enactments with interviews and archival footage. Showing how showbiz and the media consistently distorted Miranda's image, Solberg offers a passionate polemic against her reductive portrayal as a sexualised Latina. **Ela Bittencourt**

ELLE

Valeria Sarmiento (France, 1995)

Revisiting a subject sanctified by one of the great directors is always risky, which may account for the neglect of Valeria Sarmiento's coolly elegant *Elle* (1995). Luis Buñuel's *El* (1952) was one of his Mexican melodramas: the story of a neurotic bachelor who, after marrying a beautiful woman, submits her to increasingly deranged accusations of infidelity and pleas for forgiveness. Based on a 1926 novel by the Spanish feminist Mercedes Pinto, then exiled in Uruguay, it resolutely takes the husband Francisco's point of view. But what about his victim, Gloria? Sarmiento's version, filmed in Sofia and co-scripted by her partner Raúl

SARAH GAVRON ON...



THE APPLE

Samira Makhmalbaf (Iran, 1998)

I first saw *The Apple*, by Samira Makhmalbaf (daughter of filmmaker Mohsen Makhmalbaf), when I was at film school and I was blown away by it. It is the story of the aftermath of an extraordinary real-life incident in which two 11-year-old girls were discovered to have been kept by their father confined in their own home since their birth.

Only days after they emerged for the first time, Samira started filming – working with

the real girls and their parents. The film mixes fiction and documentary to create something that is so truthful, tender and compelling. It is political in the best sense – telling a deeply personal and particular story that makes us reflect on oppression and much more. As a female director working in that society, Makhmalbaf is breaking so many taboos – and she was only 17 when she shot the film. I have also loved her subsequent work, especially *Blackboards* (2000), again filled with astonishing images and moments that have stayed with me. **Sarah Gavron** 🍏

Ruiz, returned to Pinto's semi-autobiographical novel to show the marriage as a true *folie à deux*, in which these two tortured souls provoke each other to new extremes of paranoia and perversion. A decade after her debut feature, *Notre mariage*, *Elle* revealed Sarmiento's instinctive take on romantic illusion and disillusion. **Ian Christie**

WELCOME II THE TERRORDOME

Ngozi Onwurah (UK, 1995)

Born in Nigeria to a white British mother and a Nigerian father, Ngozi Onwurah moved to England at a young age, where she and her brother – her future producer Simon – faced intense racism. Onwurah parlayed this experience into raw, personal shorts (1988's *Coffee Coloured Children*, 1990's *The Body Beautiful*) before making her feature debut with the gruelling *Welcome II The Terrordome*. It opens with a prologue set in North Carolina in 1652, in which members of an Ibo family drown themselves rather than succumbing to slavery. It subsequently leaps into the near-future to submerge the viewer in a rancid, neon-streaked inner-city slum – the Terrordome – where racism, drugs and crime are as rife as the violence visited upon the majority black inhabitants by the police. Precious slivers of compassion puncture the choleric fug, but this is one bad trip, remarkable for the white-hot intensity of

its rage. Its lack of restraint may have in part accounted for the negative reviews it received on release, but its trenchant commentary on police brutality is hyper-relevant today. **Ashley Clark**

BASTARD OUT OF CAROLINA

Anjelica Huston (US, 1996)

When it became clear that Hollywood had expectations that, if she was to direct, Anjelica Huston would continue her father John's legacy with a sequel to *Prizzi's Honor*, she turned instead to television for her harrowing coming-of-age drama based on Dorothy Allison's novel of the same name. The film follows the quiet if fiery Ruth Anne 'Bone' Boatwright, growing up poor and illegitimate in 1950s South Carolina, where she endures physical and sexual abuse at the hands of her sadistic stepfather. After Ted Turner of Turner Entertainment refused to air the film due to its "graphic violence", the film instead screened at Cannes in the Un Certain Regard sidebar. A critical success, it earned Huston an Emmy nomination for her direction. Starring a young Jena Malone and Jennifer Jason Leigh, *Bastard out of Carolina* is a poignant, masterful debut. **Kelli Weston**

KISSED

Lynne Stopkewich (Canada, 1996)

What's remarkable about Lynne Stopkewich's

Kissed (1996) is not that it's disappeared from circulation, but that it was ever released in cinemas at all. A debut (in fact, MFA thesis) film adapting a first-person short story by a little-known Canadian writer – Barbara Gowdy's 'We So Seldom Look on Love' – *Kissed* was lead actor Molly Parker's breakthrough, as a necrophiliac. Parker plays Sandra, whose mother's death during her childhood creates an abiding fixation with the moment of death. Using a soundtrack by Sarah McLachlan and eschewing gratuitous voyeurism, Stopkewich achieves erotic transcendence with little more than the artful lighting of Parker's translucent skin, haunted expressions and balletic gestures, and a gently Canadian black humour. Released in 1997 – between *Crash* (David Cronenberg, 1996) and *Romance* (Catherine Breillat, 1999) – *Kissed* also met with concern from the BBFC but, in contrast to those films' ironic moral comedy, it exhibits a sexual tenderness at once emotionally raw, gently observational and truly radical. **Sophie Mayer**

THE WATERMELON WOMAN

Cheryl Dunye (US, 1996)

Dunye should be a household name – with *The Watermelon Woman* she was the first gay African-American female filmmaker to write and direct a commercially released feature film. In her exploration of self and sexuality Dunye plays herself – a passionate cinephile and low-budget filmmaker working in a VHS rental store. When she decides to make a passion project out of trying to discover the true identity of an actress credited as 'The Watermelon Woman', she makes a film about her investigation and journeys the potholed history of black and gay women on screen.

Part faux documentary and part driven by its fictional story, it's playfully meta and radically fresh. Cheryl's subplot about her flirtations with a white woman (Guinevere Turner) allows for a gorgeous lovemaking scene, yet the sexual preference of the cast and the interracial romance is presented nonchalantly and without sensation or scorn. *The Watermelon Woman* has a 90s jive and charm yet despite its joshing attitude brings home truths still haunting women in film today and is a testament to the importance of staking a claim. **Corrina Antrobus**

WILL IT SNOW FOR CHRISTMAS?

Sandrine Veysset (France, 1996)

Veysset started as a driver and the art director's assistant on Leos Carax's *Les Amants du Pont-Neuf* (1991) while still a student. Inspired by the experience, she apparently dropped out of her French literature course to pursue a career in film. Her debut, *Will It Snow for Christmas?* (*Y aura-t-il de la neige à Noël?*), would seem to follow more in the naturalist tradition of Robert Guédiguian – set in a Provence that is austere for those who work the land. In this case, a nameless woman cares for a farm with her seven children; the brood's authoritarian father has another family on a nearby estate. Veysset portrays the minutiae of farming life, finding occasional moments of joy in the mother and kids' burdened lives as the film

spans spring to a bleak mid-winter. Notable for its unsentimental depiction of rural life, Veysset's film went on to win the César for best first feature. Her next two films, *Victor... pendant qu'il est trop tard* (1999) and *Martha... Martha* (2001), were equally compelling and poetic explorations of the vicissitudes of family life. **Lizzie Francke**

EVE'S BAYOU

Kasi Lemmons (US, 1997)

"The summer I killed my father I was ten years old," the narrator Eve Batiste says coolly. What follows is a Southern Gothic coming-of-age tale reminiscent of Tennessee Williams, but still quite unlike any film before or since. The meticulous and assured directorial debut from former actress Kasi Lemmons (who also wrote the film) tells the story of the glamorous but tragically dysfunctional Batiste family: Louis (Samuel L. Jackson), their beloved, charming patriarch, is a shameless philanderer whose adulterous habits threaten to rip his family apart. At the centre is young Eve (Jurnee Smollett), forced prematurely to navigate a world of complicated adult issues, before the whisper of one terrible secret cements the loss of innocence. Following

its release, the film was showered with critical acclaim, particularly for Lemmons and Smollett, and it remains a mesmerising, haunting film about memory, history and family. **Kelli Weston**

OUT OF PHOENIX BRIDGE

Li Hong (China, 1997)

Jump-started by Wu Wenguang, Duan Jinchuan and Jiang Yue in the early 1990s, the New Documentary Movement renewed the way Chinese cameras approached 'reality'. Li Hong gave this quiet revolution a powerful female voice when she lived several months in a tiny room no bigger than a closet with four girls from a remote village in Hunan province who had come to Beijing to work as noodle vendors or domestics. Li kept filming minute moments of these invisible lives, confronted her own preconceived ideas and learnt, as documentary filmmaker Johan van der Keuken has stated, that it is "difficult to touch the real". Gradually the piece shifts its focuses from the young women's material conditions to their intimate emotions, to the stories of family pressures, enduring poverty and lost loves that are hidden in the snowy back alleys of the faraway Phoenix Bridge. Distributed in the



AGNÈS VARDA ON...



MARTHA... MARTHA

Sandrine Veysset (France, 2001)

The first film written and directed by Sandrine Veysset, *Will It Snow for Christmas?*, made its mark, but her third film, *Martha... Martha*, remains almost unknown.

It impressed me and I was sorry that even after earning its FIPRESCI critics' award at Cannes, it didn't reach a decent-sized audience.

The screenplay is daring in the way it makes us feel how depression can build up, regardless of circumstance.

The characters are well written: Martha, Raymond and their daughter Lise facing the highs and lows of Martha's mental storm together.

I like Valérie Donzelli as Martha, a mixture

of violence and sadness (since then she has acted in numerous films and directed the well-received *Declaration of War* in 2011).

I like Yann Goven as Martha's husband, playing the role of a powerless helper.

The girl, half-abandoned by her parents, echoes Martha's own difficult childhood.

I want to emphasise just how skilful Veysset is in making us share Martha's confusion and contradictions.

I like films that are really sad and don't try to propose false hope. The image of Martha in a white dress disappearing slowly into the dark lake has remained with me over the years...

Agnès Varda

PS There has not even been a DVD edition, which is a shame, though you can still find it on video on demand. ☹

US by Women Make Movies, *Out of Phoenix Bridge* (Hui dao fenghuang qiao) remains a solitary landmark. Li's delicate (too feminine?) *mise en scène* turned off potential international backers, and she subsequently joined the television station CCTV. **Bérénice Reynaud**

BUT I'M A CHEERLEADER

Jamie Babbitt (US, 1999)

This year California became the latest state to ban the use of 'conversion therapy' on gay minors. A decade and a half before that, director Jamie Babbitt made her feature debut with a prescient comedy about a peppy cheerleader forced to attend a summer camp that claims to 'cure' gay teens. Written by future *Smallville* showrunner Brian Wayne Peterson, *But I'm a Cheerleader* was ahead of its time in its sympathetic but wildly irreverent take on sexual stereotypes, with a cast of cult favourites including Natasha Lyonne (*Orange Is the New Black*), Clea DuVall (*Carnivàle*), Melanie Lynskey (*Two and a Half Men*) and RuPaul (in a rare non-drag appearance). Out and proud but also defiantly silly, it was not a success with critics, perhaps because in the era of *Boys Don't Cry* (1999) it was deemed inappropriate to sympathetically explore LGBT themes in a mainstream movie with anything other than serious furrowed brows. **Catherine Bray**

THE HAT

Michèle Cournoyer (Canada, 1999)

In *The Hat*, an exotic dancer performs in front of shapeless figures with dark hats while remembering being abused as a child. But this is not just a film about sexual abuse; it is about addiction, love, seduction and emotional manipulation – and its impact lies in its complexity of emotions.

For Cournoyer, *The Hat* was a personal battle. For months she struggled with physical demons and creative roadblocks in order to find the voice for her film. As she tumbled further into the pits of emotional hell, Cournoyer found her Virgil in the form of producer Pierre Hébert. His support, encouragement and guidance helped her produce one of the darkest, dirtiest and most complex films to emerge from the cold scrubbed halls of the National Film Board of Canada.

What is most disturbing about *The Hat* is not the graphics, it's the memories and imaginations that loom underneath our hats. *The Hat* takes us to places we do not want to see, to a darkness that lurks behind our scared small-talk smiles. In this darkness we stumble. **Chris Robinson**

THE DAY I BECAME A WOMAN

Marzieh Meshkini (Iran, 2000)

Meshkini's first feature, shot exclusively in exteriors on gorgeous Kish island in Iran, tells three successive tales of rebellious female empowerment at separate ages: Hava enjoys sharing tamarind pulp and a lollipop with a male friend a few hours before she turns nine and officially loses her freedom by becoming a woman. Ahoo fiercely pedals her bicycle with other women while her husband and other male



Pedal power: Marzieh Meshkini's *The Day I Became a Woman* (2000)

relatives on horses try to restrain her. Hoora, a dowager, buys a beach full of home furnishings at a nearby mall and has them hauled out to sea. All three tales are allegorical and sensual, and the leisurely pacing of the first is followed by the constant motion of the second. The surrealist deconstruction of domestic space in the third brings the three characters together, and once again turns the censorship rules into creative opportunities. **Jonathan Rosenbaum**

HAPPY MAN

Malgorzata Szumowska (Poland, 2000)

Since this admirably assured first feature, made when she was just 27, Szumowska has established herself as one of the most successful, productive and rewarding Polish filmmakers working today. Her debut deploys a meticulously measured pace to construct a concise but rich character study – initially elliptical and enigmatic but finally wholly lucid – of a thirtysomething slacker, a would-be writer content to live with (and, to some extent, off) his mother. When it appears she may be terminally ill, he decides to change his ways and marry, all too quickly settling on a single mother who works in a local factory. Using extremely eloquent imagery (strikingly shot by Michal Englert, who to this day collaborates with Szumowska as both director of photography and occasional co-writer), long takes (many with little or no dialogue) and terse, robust performances, Szumowska teases out the various cruel ironies and subtle nuances of a fragile emotional triangle, to very impressive effect. **Geoff Andrew**

CHICO

Ibolya Fekete (Hungary, 2001)

Hungarian independent screenwriter and director Ibolya Fekete's second feature, *Chico* (2001), is effectively a biopic of the life and times of Eduardo 'Chico' Rózsa-Flores, a Bolivian-Hungarian-Croatian journalist, actor, mercenary, and alleged secret agent, who fought with the

Croatians in the Croatian War of Independence in the early 1990s. Rózsa-Flores was a strange Zelig-like character and the ingenuity of Fekete's film is to cast Rózsa-Flores as himself, throwing fiction and documentary together to create a maelstrom of possibilities. Assassinated in 2009, his life was more dramatic and full of bizarre twists and turns than any screenwriter would normally dare to tackle, but Fekete deftly embeds archive and surreal reimaginings of what might really have happened to Chico as he zigzags through his less than reliable chronicle of his own life. Enriched with lavish detail to embellish the low-budget film, there are touches of genius throughout, and Fekete remains in full control of both her subject and film, for which she won Best Director at the Karlovy Vary festival. That Fekete hasn't been given more opportunity to direct is a great loss; she is currently in post-production on her third feature *Mom and Other Loonies in the Family*. **Suzy Gillett**

ISAN SPECIAL

Mingmongkol Sonakul (Thailand, 2002)

The first (and so far only) feature by the producer of Apichatpong Weerasethakul's *Mysterious Object at Noon* is a true one-off. A bus leaves from Bangkok's Mhor Chit for Isan, the huge north-eastern province. It's a full-moon night. Rain starts to fall. Then it happens: the passengers are suddenly lip-syncing a radio soap opera. It's about a bitchy supermodel, cheated out of her money and reduced to working in a hotel: the story is absurd and torrid, crammed with superstitions and fruity stereotypes. At rest-stops and when the driver changes a flat tyre, normal conversation resumes. There's no denouement, no rational explanation. It could be a comment on Thai pop culture or on the Thai class system. Or the passengers could be revealing their secret desires. Or is something supernatural going on? Mingmongkol spills no conceptual beans, but she layers the physical and metaphorical journeys with considerable wit and humour. **Tony Rayns**

ELLE EST DES NOTRES

Siegrid Alnoy (France, 2003)

The title of Siegrid Alnoy's drama literally means, 'She's one of ours', and the line – also translatable as 'She's a jolly good fellow' – comes from a drinking song that tests the individual's qualifications for membership of the social tribe. Alnoy's film follows the experiences of Christine Blanc (her surname suggesting a 'blank'), a temp moving from office to office in a French provincial town. Anxious to belong – anywhere she can – Christine latches on to Patricia, her contact at the temp agency, as a possible friend; but it's only through a sudden act of violence that she at last enters the social order. An unnervingly chilly, detached style – both visual and sonic – together with a superbly enigmatic lead performance by Sasha Andres, make this one of cinema's most trenchant inquiries into the workplace as a zone of alienation, and one of the great recent depictions of a woman in crisis. **Jonathan Romney**

TARAHUMARAS

Raymonde Carasco (France, 2003)

Raymonde Carasco (1939-2009) was a writer and filmmaker, who documented the Tarahumara people of north-west Mexico. Inspired by Eisenstein and Antonin Artaud's creative travels in the country, in 1931 and 1936 respectively, she made a series of trips to Mexico with her husband Régis Hébraud, beginning in the summer of 1976. Shooting entirely in 16mm, she devoted 18 films to creating a detailed portrait of the Tarahumara, from *Divisadero 77 or Gradiwa Western* (36 mins, 1977) to the final monument entitled *Tarahumaras 2003, the Crack of Time*, which was divided into five parts: 'The Before: the Apaches' (38 mins), 'Childhood' (44 mins), 'Initiation: Gloria' (48 mins), 'Raspador: el Sueño' (42 mins), 'La Despedida' (50 mins). With the help of the shaman Ceverico, the main protagonist of *Tarahumaras 2003*, Carasco keeps coming back to a mysterious and complex dimension: the mind in all its multifaceted variety, including dreams, images, visions and thoughts. Carasco invented an ethnology of mental experiences. **Nicole Brenez**

DAY NIGHT DAY NIGHT

Julia Loktev (US/France/Germany, 2006)

The feature debut of Russian-born Julia Loktev is as unforgettable as it is almost unbearable. Its first part, grey and anti-spectacular, shows an ethnically indeterminate young woman being prepped to carry out a suicide bombing by masked men in an anonymous hotel room. Its second part, amid the dazzling neon and shrieking soundscapes of New York's Time Square, tracks her as she tries to accomplish her bloody mission. To think of this as a 9/11 film is a red herring; its real antecedents are Yoko Ono's *Rape* and Vito Acconci's *Following Piece* (both 1969), both of them disturbing and conceptual ambulatory pieces set in big cities. In its rigorous focus on the repetitive and coercive ways women's bodies are disciplined, it also bears the imprint

of Chantal Akerman's *Jeanne Dielman* (1975). Thrilling, isolationist and deeply disturbing, it suggests we consider suicide bombing as a form of performance art. **Sukhdev Sandhu**

GERMAN + RAIN

Yokohama Satoko (Japan, 2007)

Accept no Japanese substitutes, Yokohama Satoko is the real deal. Her debut feature centres on an indomitable misfit, 16-year-old Yoshiko, alone since her parents divorced. She'd like to be a singer-songwriter, but small-town life offers her no breaks. So she and a young German guy work as assistant gardeners, and she takes a side-job giving music lessons to three primary-school boys, one of whom wants to be a girl. The plot turns on her botched entry in a music competition and her one-woman-army reprisals against a local paedophile. Yokohama financed the film herself, using the prize money she won for a student short, and became one of the few Japanese independents to catch the attention of the film industry; many other young women are looking to follow her example. *German + Rain* is wildly inventive and comic, and its centre of gravity is its celebration of its dumpy, belligerent heroine. **Tony Rayns**

BEHIND THE RAINBOW

Jihan El-Tahri (Egypt/South Africa, 2009)

Egyptian filmmaker El-Tahri's feature-length documentary provides a crucial record, in extraordinary detail, of the transformation of the African National Congress (ANC) from a liberation organisation in exile to a ruling party in government. The film builds an analytical picture of the end of apartheid, the negotiations leading up to the first democratic elections in South Africa in 1994, and Nelson Mandela's presidency. It explores the growing rivalry between Thabo Mbeki, who succeeded Mandela

as president in 1999, and Jacob Zuma, president since 2009. The film highlights allegations of corruption against Zuma, and their outcomes, providing an important historical thread to continuing discontent during his subsequent presidency. El-Tahri incorporates several forms of representation, including interviews with key players in the ANC's history; rare, archival footage of the ANC in exile, and police brutality within South Africa; as well as aesthetically constructed dramatic visualisations. **Jacqueline Maingard**

MIDDLE OF NOWHERE

Ava DuVernay (US, 2012)

Ava DuVernay was the first African-American female director to earn a Golden Globe nomination for *Selma*, but was controversially overlooked in the Academy Award's Best Director category even as *Selma* was nominated for Best Picture. So although her name might chime with a certain amount of Hollywood fanfare, there's still a case for saying that the elegant layers of Ava DuVernay's artistry remain under-appreciated. This is emphatically true with regard to the underrated grandeur of *Middle of Nowhere*, DuVernay's second feature and a curiously under-seen gem, having had only a limited US release and – save for the odd festival outing – no theatrical release at all in the UK.

The Los Angeles-based drama centres on medical student Ruby (Emayatzy Corinealdi) who finds her life put on pause while she dutifully awaits the return of her incarcerated husband – that is, until she meets Brian, charmingly played by David Oyelowo. Their tentative romance, which DuVernay expertly choreographs with quietly paced sophistication, takes Ruby beyond the 'nowhere' of despair and solitude. It's a poignant exploration of womanhood, love, betrayal and ultimately renaissance, enchantingly spun in lavender and sepia tones by DP Bradford Young. **Jan Asante**



Waiting for happiness: Ava DuVernay's *Middle of Nowhere* (2012)



TWINS' PEAK
Brian Helgeland's *Legend*, starring Tom Hardy as both Ronnie (left) and Reggie Kray, focuses on the brothers' Soho nightclub-owning heyday, building towards a climax with the murders of Jack 'The Hat' McVitie and George Cornell



THE BROTHERS GRIM

The legacy of the Kray twins has haunted every British gangster flick since the late 60s, fuelling a rash of films marked by tired scripts and mockney clichés, but ‘Legend’, directed by the American Brian Helgeland, rejuvenates the genre with an enthralling take on the story

By Nick James

When it comes to Ronnie and Reggie Kray, the brutal twins from Bethnal Green who ruled London’s gangland in the 1950s and 60s, the word ‘legend’ can play on an extra meaning beyond the obvious one of their infamy. It is: “The wording on a map or diagram explaining the symbols used.” For the keepers of London geezer mythology, the Krays were all about territory and there’s a Google map called ‘Kray Twins, East London’ that cries out for lurid symbols to be placed in the speech-bubble-style markings. Why, eight minutes’ walk from my own front door is the house in Evering Road, N16, where Jack ‘The Hat’ McVitie was stabbed to death – a red circle with a black knife would seem apt for that. Eight minutes more would take me to Cedra Court, in Cazenove Road, where both twins had flats – would a portcullis do? No doubt a hammer would serve for the dozens of small businesses placed under the twins’ ‘protection’, and a pistol, of course, for The Blind Beggar pub on Whitechapel Road where George Cornell was shot for, it is said, calling Ronnie a “fat poof”.

Rereading John Pearson’s *The Profession of Violence*, which details the Kray chronology and geography, one understands what ‘territory’ meant in post-World War II London. Gangs ‘ruled’ and were based at particular pubs on particular streets, often those with mar-



kets, like Watney Street in Shadwell, or the Bermondsey base of the Richardson gang. But if the Krays' physical and psychological hold on actual territory—a long list of premises now repurposed or vanished—is now merely commemorated, the cinematic space their legend still occupies remains impressive.

There's hardly a British gangster film of the dozens made since the arrest and imprisonment of the Krays in 1968 that doesn't genuflect towards them, yet not one—not even Nic Roeg and Donald Cammell's prompt *Performance* (1970)—is so indelible that it would put off American director Brian Helgeland from making a Kray film. "To do an Italian-American gangster movie is pointless—you're going to fall short," he told me. "But when Tim Bevan [of Working Title] called me because they wanted to do a film about the Krays, my initial attraction was that I could do a gangster film and escape that Italian-American comparison."

I don't think Helgeland (screenwriter of 1997's *L.A. Confidential*) is taking liberties here. He's right in that, despite the brilliance of its gangster-meets-reclusive-pop-star premise, *Performance* lacks epic status. That other main contender *The Long Good Friday* (1980) also feels provincial in scope next to *The Godfather* (1972) or *Goodfellas* (1990). But *Performance* does pose a different challenge to Kray recreators: it wove together the 1960s excitements of pop and violence so beguilingly that it is talismanic. *Performance* and *The Long Good Friday* are still the Kray-inspired films that every British gangster filmmaker—even Guy Ritchie and Matthew Vaughn—wants to measure up to; they all envy that druggy, sexually ambiguous vibe, which has never been equalled since James Fox and Mick Jagger swapped identities.

For the actual taking of liberties, however, there's always Peter Medak's *The Krays* (1990). Hysteria was the tone set from the start, with Billie Whitelaw, as mum Violet, screaming in pain during the boys' birth at the same time as she recounts, in voiceover, a dream about being a swan. There's that already dated sitcom bustle around the open front doors and scrubbed front steps where the boys grew up, with a wartime cop (the late Stephen Lewis, Blakey in *On the Buses*) hunting out the draft-dodging dozy dad. *The Krays* seemed to be cosily focused on its stars, the Kemp brothers from Spandau Ballet, loving each other and obeying their screen mum. Philip Ridley's script gave us the knees-up version of the Krays. At times, it was not too far away from Monty Python's fabulous Piranha brothers sketch, which talks about the Piranhas being "nice and friendly" even if they might also have "nailed your head to the floor". Gary and Martin Kemp, as they stepped into the ring to thump each other bloody, glared and pouted as if they expected dry ice, not ice in a bucket. It's a film to be fond of but, to use the undying terminology, it lacks respect.

These are some of the reasons why I'm glad it's an American such as Helgeland at the helm of *Legend*. He doesn't have to drink from the same poisoned well frequented by Brits making a gangster film (see all those 'Cool Britannia' examples made in the wake of Ritchie's 1998 blokey-joke *Lock, Stock and Two Smoking Barrels*). Helgeland takes the question of a Kray brothers gangster movie seriously. "The thing with biopics, which I learned making 42 [about legendary baseball player Jackie Robinson], is not to do the whole life but to go for



I was intrigued by how much the Krays had slipped into legend—as much as King Arthur or Robin Hood

the important years. It wasn't like, 'Yes, I'll do it.' I wanted to see if it was something I could really do as a two-year life commitment. I did a lot of research; I probably read 25 books. I was intrigued by how much the Krays had slipped into legend—as much as King Arthur or Robin Hood. There's a lot of point of view and opinion, a lot of tabloid elements, so who knows what the truth is? That's interesting. I'd seen a picture of one of the hearses at Ronnie's funeral which had 'Legend' written in carnations, six feet long. I was very intrigued by that because I don't want to be looking down or in judgement on them. I had to be with them and I found an empathy with Reggie in that he had a sense of duty to his brother and his family, which always seemed a good American way in."

Legend, wisely, skips the childhood, sidelines Violet (in deference to *The Krays*, which Helgeland says he enjoyed) and homes in on the twins' heyday, which begins with their assault on rival gangs, continues with their acquisition of Soho nightclubs and builds towards the climax of the murders of Cornell and McVitie. That's the Kray story that every Englishman expects and will come out for; but Helgeland sought an additional way into the material for women and his fellow Americans, an idea that emerged when he was given the royal tour of the Krays' old territory by Chris Lambrianou, a former member of the brothers' gang 'The Firm'. The director was curious about Reggie's girlfriend, Frances Shea (Emily Browning), the teenager whom Reggie wooed and married, much against her parents' wishes.

"When I asked Freddie Foreman [a Kray henchman] about her he dismissed her as just a pretty face," Helgeland says. "I had a photo of Barbara Windsor sitting with her in a nightclub, so I asked her and she couldn't remember anything particular, [other than that she was] beautiful and quiet. After spending a day with Chris Lambrianou, we ended up at the Carpenter's Arms in Bethnal Green. It was closed because it was being painted. We were just stood there waiting for his nephew to come pick him up. I asked him about Frances and he said, 'She's the reason we all went to prison'—because after her death Reggie became less vigilant in tidying up after the gang's crimes. "I knew right away that I had found the movie. I decided to have Leslie narrate the film, as in



PHOTOGRAPH BY GETTY IMAGES (C)



FIRM FRIENDS

When Brian Helgeland (above left) was told that Frances (Emily Browning, below left), the wife of Reggie Kray (Tom Hardy, above), was the reason the Krays were caught, he knew he had his movie; (below) Ronnie Kray (Tom Hardy) with burglar/croupier Leslie Holt (Charlie Parker Merrell)



Sunset Blvd. It's very subtle – some people might not even get it – but she's narrating it from beyond. That she loves Reggie makes him more accessible. It's a way to open him up without him doing it himself, which he probably wouldn't."

When I watched *Legend*, I didn't expect genius. I knew Tom Hardy was playing both twins, and I'm an admirer of his, but otherwise I was open to the Brit gangster probability that it might be cartoonish. Instead, I was enthralled. London in the early 60s is realised with conviction (and a deft use of green screen). The feel of the pubs and nightclubs accords with my own childhood memory of such places, where my father would often stick me in a corner with a lemonade and packet of crisps. It's impossible to say which of Tom Hardy's performances is the more mesmerising: his vein-bulging Ron or his smooth punisher Reg. If the 'way in' through Frances doesn't always come off – at least as far as her own tragedy is concerned – it does bring a necessary counterpoint to the power of Hardy, creating the chance for him to show different shadings in both men.

"I was leery about using twins," says Helgeland, "and I wondered: should I get one guy to play both of them? On the one hand it's a gimmick, and if people are trying to sort out where the trick is, the movie's going to fail. Reggie was the lead, so I thought I'd cast Reggie first. I had seen Tom [Hardy] in *Warrior* and thought his character had a lot of Reggie-like qualities, so he was the first guy I went to. He read the script and we had dinner and, from the time we sat down, all he talked about was Ron. If you look at Tom's body of work, Ron is clearly the guy he's going to go for. At the end of the dinner, I said,





◀ ‘You want to be Ron, but I want you to be Reg.’ And Tom said, ‘I’ll play Reg if you let me play Ron.’ Movies go wrong early on and you can never get them right again. That was a place where we could have gone wrong from the start but we didn’t.

“The curious thing is that I now know Reggie really well and Ron really well, but I don’t think I know Tom. I’ve never even told him, but it was very easy to direct Ron, he arrived very friendly, always had his hand on my shoulder – ‘What are we doing?’ He’s always in character, one or the other – not in a silly you-have-to-pretend way, you can still call him Tom – but as Reggie he was much more cautious and wanted to know the detail before he would do anything. With directing it should always be just, ‘Move to the right a little bit.’ If you’re having to really heavily direct an actor then you’ve got the casting wrong.”

You can read about the magic of Hardy in David Thomson’s essay (right), but I want to add my own pennyworth to the idea that he has movie-star quality in a way that’s rare and seems unmanufactured. His Ronnie could have veered toward the comical, but the hair-trigger apoplexy and relish for battle Hardy gives him never fails to startle and hold one’s gaze. “I prefer boys myself,” he says when offered a woman by an Italian-American Mafia don, and gets incredulous respect for his honesty. As for his Reggie, Helgeland has this to say: “He [Hardy] wouldn’t want to hear it, but sometimes, when he was on the set playing Reggie, we’d all be back by the monitors looking at him and saying, ‘This is a James Bond audition.’ As Reggie he feels more like a 40s, 50s, 60s movie star to me. He’s Cary Grant in a way, those guys who look great in suits.”

As for the territory, Helgeland credits director of photography Dick Pope – “a teenager at that time but he saw those streets with his own eyes” – for getting it right. “I met David Bailey early on and the very first thing that he said to me was that it was all time and place. He couldn’t have existed without it and they couldn’t have existed without it. I held on to that all the way through, especially during pre-production. London had to be captured as this amazing time and place. You want to feel it; you don’t want people to sit around and talk about it, because I don’t think people knew it was happening when it was happening.”

i **Legend** is released in UK cinemas on 9 September and is reviewed on page 86

When Tom was on the set playing Reggie, we’d look at him and say, ‘This is a James Bond audition.’ As Reggie he feels more like a 40s, 50s, 60s movie star

DOUBLE VISION
Brian Helgeland initially wanted to cast Tom Hardy as Reggie but the actor was more interested in the character of Ronnie. He told the director, ‘I’ll play Reg if you let me play Ron.’

LOOKING FOR MR HARDY

Tom Hardy’s chameleon-like genius as an actor is so compelling that he needn’t have stopped at playing the Kray twins – he could easily have taken on the role of their mother too

By David Thomson

Some time around the Fourth of July, I was having dinner with the Telluride Film Festival in Berkeley, California. During the halibut, the festival asked about *Legend*. I said I hadn’t seen it. The festival was trying to set up a screening, of the sort it requires to make sure a picture is worthy of being in the festival.

“Why bother?” I asked. “Invite the film.” “Sight unseen?” the festival wondered.

That’s what I proposed. If ever there was the collision of a movie and a moment, this was it. Tom Hardy at the height of his explosive arc, a worthy American screenwriter/director (Brian Helgeland), and that undying Laurel and Hardy of London in the 60s, the Krays, our adorable untouchables. A licence to kill for guys who once knew Barbara Windsor! It was such a natural, who needed to test that picture when everyone was wild to see it?

It might or might not be good – it was hot, the way movies are meant to be. But imagine, if the Krays had been triplets – the third being an Oxbridge-educated accountant, the brains of the group, like brother Charlie in *On the Waterfront* – this could be *The Brothers Kraysamazov*, with Tom playing all three. And personally, I think they missed a trick in not getting Hardy to play Mum, too. I know, in recognition of the immense Billie Whitelaw last time out (*The Krays*), Mum had been rested for this picture. But Tom in drag? I wanted it.

We feel proprietorial when it comes to actors – but that only happens if they have begun to take possession of us. It was all very well to say Hardy was once a nice, sweet-faced south London boy, rural looking, not so tall, a little fleshy and soft mouthed, to say nothing of that elastic voice. But he had been a US soldier twice, just getting started, in *Band of Brothers* (2001) and *Black Hawk Down* (2001). He did voices the way the Krays’ Mum would have poured cups of tea. He was sort of Noël Coward in *Inception* (2010), but roaring like King Kong in *Bronson* (2008). There was a feeling that he might do anything; it was elemental, threatening and lovely.

In the spring of 2014, at the San Francisco Film Festival, just after it had opened (and closed) in the US, I said that *Locke* was one of the best films to be seen then, and the festival audience cooed with tasteful ignorance.

At the Denver festival, in November 2014, I introduced *The Drop* and hardly anyone could believe that Tom Hardy had been raised in East Sheen and not Brooklyn. I asked the audience to see not just that Hardy was an inspired pretender as the humble but lethal barkeep, but that *The Drop* might have been called *Off the Waterfront*, because Tom was doing a version of Brando, with a bull terrier puppy standing in for the pigeons.

The Denver people promised they would search out *Locke*, and they began to sense tremors in the ground when I warned them that within the year this shy, fumbling, sheepish, gentle guy would be their very own Mad Max, a gleeful mix of Fagin and the Krays in *Peaky Blinders* (2013-), the wicked twins in *Legend*, and even a grim enemy to Leonardo DiCaprio in the snowy wilderness and suspect vision of Alejandro González Iñárritu for *The Revenant*. (Me, I'm suspicious.)

The Revenant then was just a flake in the snow – I still haven't seen it as I write – but I felt apprehension for Leonardo, not just in a physical sense (surely Tom could crush him – especially if he was playing the bear), but because Hardy is an actor born to topple flabby stars and fading box-office champs. Somehow, this Thomas Hardy had the capacity not only to enact the physical transformation that distinguished *Bronson* and his boxer in 2011's *Warrior* (to say nothing of Bane in 2012's *The Dark Knight Rises*), but to make us believe that the monstrosity began deep inside and grew outwards. Hardy was a foxy pretender, to be sure (hadn't he reprised the Robert Mitchum

I felt apprehension for Leonardo DiCaprio because Hardy is an actor born to topple flabby stars and fading box-office champs



Solitary man: Hardy as the notorious prisoner in *Bronson*

of *Thunder Road* in *Lawless* in 2012?), but so controllably out of control that you worried for any actor getting in the ring with him.

Long before the trailer, I foresaw a single shot of Ronnie and Reggie in *Legend* where Ronnie was out of it, impacted, while Reg, the deft joker, was trying to coax him out of his black mood, but not unaware that he might have to off him one day, just to get along. I trusted Hardy so much that there

really was no pressing need to see the film itself. Moreover, which of us hasn't learned how the pleasures in waiting for a movie can exceed that delivered when it actually appears? Tom wasn't Mum in the film, and clearly its surreal panache, and its psychic horror could have been at white heat if she had been crooning to two naughty boys on her lap – they can do anything now with CGI.

A DANGEROUS METHOD

Of course, you can see danger in Tom as Mum, too. All of a sudden the audience primed for head-butting, razor-slashing and the general glamorisation of appalling human beings, would grow uneasy because Hardy as Mum might seem 'unreal' or 'deflating'. There is a fantasy in getting off on the Krays (just as there was with the Corleones), yet if you look at photos of the real twins there is a blankness in their faces, a nullity, that can't work on the screen, and which we don't much want to see. Evil in life is not always glamorous, not even with the best swaggering actor around. Actors don't do dull, or emptiness.

Face it, a section of the filmgoing world is reluctant to see anything 'unlifelike' or far-fetched in Hardy's most boisterous adventures in beefed-up monsterism, special effects and what one might call slaughter. And Hardy has done little



Concrete jungle: Hardy plays a softly spoken Welsh construction engineer in *Locke*



Mad Max: Fury Road



Warrior



Lawless

to deter that. Why should he? Doesn't every East Sheen lad have the right to make a killing when it is offered? So why shouldn't this Hardy do Banes until kingdom come and Mad Maxes long after George Miller has given up on that absent-minded way of putting women in those pictures? Alfie Solomons from *Peaky Blinders* could be spun off into his own series – he might have been Dad to Alf Garnett! I know, Alfie is Jewish, but was that the start of Alf's dread?

If Tom Hardy ever gets to play Tom Hardy – and that's as irresistible a project as *Legend* – then you have to envisage the good little boy who did acting school, and might have been a model, but who went a little off track because of drink and drugs, the end of one marriage, before the romance with Charlotte Riley, and the way the world kept asking him to put on muscle, bluster, mindlessness and menace for major-league money and who knows what in the way of Oscars, glory and what used to be called power – as in, this actor is so big he could get anything he liked made.

Even something as odd as *Locke*, or possibly some sad romance by the earlier Thomas Hardy? I still find *Locke* the best film Hardy has been involved with – but I wonder if he shares that feeling. What would Ivan Locke think of *Bronson*, *The Take* (2009), *Warrior* or *Legend* as he drives through the night hounded by time and circumstance, wife and lover, concrete drops and the simple fact of life that people like Ivan do not really explode, turn terrible or become a Bane to the world. Nor do they copy the driving habits of Max Rockatansky.

"Isn't that the point of movies?" you say. So many people are pressured to the point of being crushed by Micawber's equation of income and expenditure, the riddle in loving the wrong people, terrorism and boredom, climate change and the unalterable flux of human nature. What's an Ivan to do but drive and keep his fingers and his soul crossed? So movies are the merciful relief of a couple of hours where this earnest, mournful Welsh chump can become a roaring monster of unhindered id looking to drop his enemies in the concrete (the way his friends disposed of Jimmy Hoffa?).

If Hardy gets an Oscar for *Legend* his world would be open, and no one can doubt the funding sources for more epics of body-building and mind-depleting action. This is our business because we like him, and because we have enjoyed his inclination to be very ordinary, rather suppressed and battered in *Locke*, *Lawless* and *The Drop*. Yet even there, in *The Drop*, the story risks human truth. I admire the notion that this Bob is sharper and more lethal than most people realise, but I'm not sure about Bob's emotional ability to smother his own force and chat with the dog or Noomi Rapace. Nor am I certain that she would, or should, go along with him after she's seen him shoot a guy in the face.

But that's the kind of movie compromise that Ivan Locke resists. You cannot do that film justice without understanding the feathered softness and self-effacing masochism of Hardy's Welsh accent – and this is an onscreen actor who falls for accents rather more than he goes for women, except in his TV *Wuthering Heights* (2009) where his bonding with Charlotte Riley seemed to forget Heathcliff and Miss Earnshaw, or even the fact that a movie was being made – they had their own agenda. The identity forger from *Inception* ("a Graham Greene type," said Hardy) and Ricki Tarr from *Tinker, Tailor, Soldier, Spy* (2011) might yet make a screen lover, urbane in dialogue and with a kissable mouth – if Hardy is so inclined.

Huge stars can become black holes so fast. Hardy may have noticed already that *Mad Max: Fury Road* didn't exactly need him. That film rode along happily enough on the umber desert of Namib, those drugged vehicles, a few beauties in windswept chiffon and the wise old women. Max was there like a mascot on the car bonnet, but surely Hardy could see that Charlize Theron was the one putting it about – and an inch taller too.

I'm more than happy with a compromise.

He might do Wilde, Picasso or even a young Churchill, and it's not out of the question to think of Tom in Thomas Hardy

Locke is the least likely of his films to get a sequel – yet maybe the most deserving. Suppose Ivan Locke's life has so disintegrated that he gives up concrete to go to Las Vegas. He was a maths-smart engineer, and that's close to gambling. So he becomes a professional, working for a casino as a cold-blooded poker genius in those high-roller games that run two nights. Such a man is reliable, well paid and well tipped, forever comped in a suite, but he is playing a system, and that defies gambling. Suppose that split in Ivan's person then turned him into someone who collects stray dogs or makes a garden on a highway meridian. (Or he could become a tranquil serial killer – just something different, profitless and irrational.) In short, this is Hardy as a new version of Jekyll and Hyde, well behaved and then very unexpected. He is the passive filmgoer and his wildest fantasies for himself, all in the same composed, but slightly overweight body.

I feel the affinity between Tom and Thomas, and some rapport with the moods of 1900 (he is not entirely contemporary). He might do Oscar Wilde, Picasso or even a young Winston Churchill (that character – a rogue – is seen briefly in *Peaky Blinders*). It's not out of the question to think of Tom in Thomas Hardy: *The Mayor of Casterbridge* or *Jude the Obscure* could beckon him. But if I had my choice I'd cast him as both men – Dowell and Ashburnham – in a movie of *The Good Soldier*.

The idea of an actor doing two parts in the same film is still usually a gimmick. *Legend's* poster boasts of its two-card trick. But that need not be so. Doubling up could be a way of gaining access to the inner nature of character, and the way acting is becoming central to our existence. (Have you seen *That Obscure Object of Desire* or *Vertigo*?) Jekyll/Hyde has always been a movie model, because it gene-splices duplicity and resemblance and helps make a circus out of murder. The most intriguing thing about Hardy is that he is good enough to chase himself. His last great predecessor, Philip Seymour Hoffman, was fatally depressive, but Tom does manic too. That's his secret sharing, deeper than CGI. 



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A DEATH IN THE FAMILY

A self-absorbed filmmaker has to come to terms with the impending death of her aged mother in Nanni Moretti's drama 'Mia madre', a fine return to form for the director which features a savagely funny turn from John Turturro as a showboating film star

By Geoff Andrew

It's probably fair to say that this writer is far from alone in considering *Mia madre* Nanni Moretti's most fully satisfying film since *The Son's Room*. As it happens, both deal with a death in the family. Whereas his 2001 Palme d'Or winner examined the effects of a teenager's accidental death on his parents and sister, the new movie explores the response of a film director – and her daughter Livia (Beatrice Mancini) and brother Giovanni (Moretti) – to the anxiously awaited death of her ailing elderly mother. Of course, Moretti had already touched on the topic of mortality – his own, due to the threat of a tumour – in *Dear Diary* (1993); while his interest in reworking a theme from a perspective diametrically opposite to its predecessor was evident in a second 'diary film', *Aprile* (1998), which among other things concerned Nanni's response to the birth of his son. (Much of his work may be seen as variations on a theme; 2006's *The Caiman* was about the infamous rise to power of Italy's prime minister Silvio Berlusconi, while 2011's *We Have a Pope* centred on the Vatican City's prime prelate.)

As with *The Son's Room*, Moretti's approach to storytelling in *Mia madre* is resolutely realist in that he constructs a deceptively discursive, loose-feeling narrative that takes in near-inconsequential scenes of not very obvious relevance to the main theme: namely, the fear, grief, guilt and sense of inadequacy the director (Margherita Buy) experiences in facing her mother's decline. Indeed, much of the action is even comic, as she carries on regardless with her film, notwithstanding certain difficulties with an Italian-American star (played with a bewitching mix of tonal subtlety and conspicuous glee by John Turturro). In other words, *Mia madre* successfully evokes the ongoing chaos of real life – a chaos actually carefully orchestrated by the psychologically astute script and unshowy but meticulous *mise en scène*. Its emotional veracity probably lies in its having been inspired, in part, by the death of Moretti's mother.

This interview took place in Cannes, a few days after the film's first screening outside Italy.

Geoff Andrew: You've made several films about living with mortality. Is it a subject of particular interest to you?

Nanni Moretti: Death happens to us all. Obviously I feel it's closer now than 30 years ago; as you get older you think about it more. What interested me most was to tell the story truthfully, not to be afraid. When something like the death of a loved one happens, you really have to face it properly. If I'm fascinated by death it's because it's part of life – and life's what fascinates me.

GA: Most films are evasive or dishonest about death.

NM: Yes; sometimes filmmakers are scared of death, so they do something grotesque. You might have a funeral scene where the dead person's mobile phone starts ringing in the tomb, or the offspring start fighting over the inheritance, or there's a revelation about a lover. But these are instances of filmmakers distancing themselves from death, not dealing with death itself. I wanted to confront it more directly.

GA: And partly through comedy.

NM: It's a natural way for me to tell a story. It's not as if I have a prescribed aesthetic programme. When I'm writing, I don't sit there thinking, 'This is how much drama and this is how much comedy there must be.' It's just that I've always, from the start of my career, enjoyed using both the dramatic mode and the comic mode. That's important in films about death, because life must go on, after all.

GA: You usually take the lead role yourself, but here your protagonist is a woman.

NM: I had that in mind from the beginning. Margherita, the director, displays many of my characteristics – by which I mean both my own and those of the characters I've played in my films. But I don't know precisely why I thought it would be more interesting to explore the situation from a woman's point of view. Actually, there are three women: we also have Margherita's mother and daughter. What I can say is that this time I preferred to be slightly on the sidelines, as an actor and as a character. I felt that perhaps Giovanni could be how Margherita would like to be; I wanted to give the impression that he's more at ease with the situation than she is.

GA: Do Margherita's reactions resemble your own response to your mother getting old?

NM: When she shouts at her mother because she can't walk by herself to the bathroom, not at all, thank heavens. But they are like mine in that she feels she really can't cope. Feeling you're unable to do or say the right thing... In that respect I'm much closer to Margherita than to Giovanni.

GA: Margherita's film is a political drama about labour relations. Why did you make it that sort of movie?

NM: I didn't want any confusion or overlap between her personal life and the story of the film she was shooting. I didn't want her making anything that might reflect

STRIKE FORCE

In *Mia madre*, from director Nanni Moretti (below right), Margherita Buy (right) plays a director shooting a movie about a dispute between factory workers and their boss, with John Turturro playing the film-within-a-film's Italian-American star Barry Huggins (below)





her own situation; it had to be totally separate. Whereas Margherita's personal life is full of uncertainties, I wanted her to be highly assertive in her professional life. I wanted the film she's working on to be as solidly structured as her private life is unstable.

GA: When did you decide on John Turturro to play the star of Margherita's film?

NM: I'd had Margherita Buy in mind for the lead even when I started writing the script. But only when I was finishing off did I start thinking about who could play the actor in Margherita's film. That's when Turturro came to mind. I'd always liked that touch of craziness you get in his performances. Also – now I'm being totally frank – he and I had already met, and I found it much easier, far less embarrassing, to offer the role to someone I already knew. Then, of course, besides everything else he has a real relationship with Italy and its culture. He even made a very nice documentary about Neapolitan song called *Passione* [2010].

GA: At one point Margherita says an actor should stand slightly to the side of the character. Isn't that your own attitude to directing actors?

NM: It's true that I don't like to see actors completely submerge themselves, where they identify so strongly with the characters they're playing that they themselves disappear. For me as a viewer, and therefore also as a director, I prefer still to be able to see something of the performer's own personality.

GA: As with Cary Grant, Katharine Hepburn or Anna Magnani?

NM: Exactly.

GA: Arvo Pärt's music is often used poorly in films. In yours it works very well. Were you nervous about selecting a composer who's been so over-used?

NM: I was a little worried that he'd been used so much, but went ahead anyway. I did a lot of work with the editor on the use of music in the film. I decided early on not to have an original score this time, but to use pre-exist-

I don't like to see actors identify so strongly with the characters that they themselves disappear. I prefer to be able to see something of the performer's own personality

ing pieces. And from the start I told him Pärt's music should be central.

GA: As a former classicist, I was intrigued by all the details about Margherita's mother having been a Latin teacher.

NM: This aspect of the film is also autobiographical, because my mother taught Latin and Greek. When in the film a former student speaks to Margherita about her mother, that's inspired by something that happened to me. After my mother's death, some of her former students told me stories about her, and I suddenly felt I'd missed out on something quite significant, even fundamental about her. I felt that very strongly, and painfully. So by dealing in the film both with Latin and with the memories of those whom Margherita's mother taught, we're looking at what remains of people who have died: they may not be here with us any more, but in this sense they do live on in our lives.

GA: The film's discussion of Latin reminds us of the risks of other kinds of loss: of historical and cultural knowledge, of a highly structured way of thinking about things.

NM: Of course, I absolutely agree.

GA: We don't see the mother's death, but only hear about it. Why choose not to depict it?

NM: I wanted to show some of the last moments of her life, but not the precise moment of death; I preferred to focus on the reactions – particularly the eyes – of Margherita's daughter as she learns of her grandmother's death. I can't really say more; that's just the way I wanted it.

GA: For me, as an atheist, once someone's died, what's most interesting is the effect of that death on the living.

NM: Indeed. Happily, I'm also an atheist. I imagine Margherita and Giovanni are too... As I said, I wanted to show what remains in this life when someone has died. If we live on, it's through the memories of others.

GA: Or, occasionally, in films...

NM: Certo! ☺

i *Mia madre* is released in UK cinemas on 25 September and is reviewed on page 89





MAN OUT OF TIME

In *Horse Money*, Pedro Costa (right) radically condenses time and space, allowing locations to stand in for more than one place and having his main 'actor', Ventura (main picture), play himself both as a young man in 1975 and as a tired old man in hospital pyjamas

THE GHOST ROAD

With his latest film, 'Horse Money', Pedro Costa builds on the mythic qualities of 'In Vanda's Room' and 'Colossal Youth' to offer a complex meditation on history and memory, colonisation and revolution, and the plight of society's poor and dispossessed

By Jacques Rancière

With each new film from Pedro Costa, it seems that the filmmaker hands us a few more clues to his work, binding his formal presuppositions and his political provocation ever closer together. The beginning of *Colossal Youth* replaced the tone of intimate conversation that characterised *In Vanda's Room* with one of tragic declamation. *Horse Money* starts silently with a series of black-and-white photos. The squalid setting is instantly identifiable: the New York slums captured at the end of the 19th century by a photographer much preoccupied with social matters and as a result often accused of miserabilism, Jacob Riis. Could this be a way for Costa, who conversely is so often accused of aestheticising poverty, to claim his part in a tradition of militant engagement? A making-visible of the furious theory that more than a century on, living conditions for the 'other half' still look the same? Perhaps. But the discomfort experienced by the spectator comes from somewhere else. These photographs of narrow streets, rickety shacks and cramped interiors remind us of something: of Fontainhas's alleys, Vanda's room, her mother's shop, Ventura and Lento's cabin, even the river along which the two pals' little boat glides. And later in the film, a series of static shots of the places inhabited by the Cape Verde



PHOTOGRAPH BY OSCAR FERNÁNDEZ ORENCO

Horse Money continues Pedro Costa's association with the now-demolished slum district in Lisbon's Fontainhas, an area which had been home to much of the city's Cape Verdean immigrant community (Costa filmed his second feature, *Casa de Lava*, in the Cape Verde islands in 1994). Costa first shot in Fontainhas for 1997's *Ossos*, working with a crew and on 35mm film, an experience he found frustrating for its disconnect from the impoverished lives he was dramatising – those of local immigrants such as Vanda and Zita. For his next two features, *In Vanda's Room* (2000) and *Colossal Youth* (2006), Costa shot on DV, which

allowed him greater intimacy to film his recurring characters over many months. *Colossal Youth* centred on Ventura, an elderly labourer about to be relocated to a high-rise estate.

Ventura is again central to *Horse Money*, most of which takes place in a vast hospital – a ghostly, unreal space in which time appears to slip, and which may represent the chambers of Ventura's memory. We follow Ventura as he wanders the halls meeting friends – some being treated for accidents at work – as well as Vitalina, a more recent arrival from Cape Verde. The film explores the characters' shared loss of both their former homeland, and of Fontainhas.

James Bell

← migrants seems to cast the monochrome New York of yesteryear in the colour palette of post-colonial Europe. It's as if Riis's photos had served as models for the filmmaker's shots, in much the same way as Tourneur's zombie stories inspired Costa's undead characters. As if in Costa's films politics, as borrowed from Riis, is first and foremost a way of constructing frames, of constructing a direct union between the materiality of a situation and the materiality of edited space.

But things are immediately more complex than this. As the photos roll out and then give way to the painter Théodore Géricault's *Portrait of a Negro*, we catch the sound of footsteps, an echo of those that, in *Colossal Youth*, led us alongside Ventura through the Gulbenkian's collection of paintings. In *Colossal Youth*, after a silent confrontation, other footsteps resounded through the museum's underground passages through which the unwelcome visitor finds himself being ejected. Here we follow the footsteps straight underground. This is what Costa's cinematographic art adds to Riis's photographic witness: time, in the shape of sound, narrativises space. And the sound of time itself is multiple. There are the individual voices and steps; the life stories which they recount, relive or reinvent; the murmur of history with which their lives intermingle: a history of colonisation and decolonisation, the songs of the Carnation Revo-

Ventura is a man replaying his life, replaying it as the present infused with history: his personal history and that of all those like him

lution and those of the young Cape Verdean republic. There are echoes that resound between films; those that blend the voices of the living and the dead and transform their displacement into a mythic voyage. It's this mythic dimension that in each of his films, from one to the next, Costa has increasingly affirmed as the true measure of the violence inflicted on all those who had to come and throw their lives away amid the construction sites and shanty towns of Capital's metropolises. With *In Vanda's Room* it was still possible to believe we were watching a documentary about the residents of Fontainhas. But in *Colossal Youth*, realist illusionism gives way more and more to mythological reconstruction. When Ventura and Lento perform their tragic dialogue in the burned-out apartment, one has the impression of having passed to the other side, of being surrounded by the residents of Hades itself. *Horse Money* pushes this logic to the extreme by implementing a radical condensation.

This is firstly a condensation of space. The relationship between our social world to a mythical hell is represented as Ventura's back-and-forth between two levels of the same place: on the one hand the subterranean labyrinth belonging to the kingdom of death and on the other the corridors of an ordinary hospital where society treats those who it has exhausted or mutilated – those who, at the beginning of the film, gather in Ventura's room. Shuttling between the dead's abode and that of the sick, the hospital lift plays the role of Charon's ferry. And the staircase leading below ground is the site of another encounter between life and death. It's here that Ventura

first notices the outline of a new figure, a new visitor to Costa's universe: Vitalina, a widow who has arrived in Cape Verde too late to attend her husband's funeral (perhaps he fell from scaffolding, perhaps he was simply worn out by migrant life), but who inherits the energy that seems to have abandoned Ventura, an obscure force that circulates between the land of the living and the land of the dead.

The only escapes from this hospital where even the windows seem opaque, the only moments where nature appears, are the memories of and hauntings by traumatic events: the garden in Estrela where immigrants fled from the militia during the Carnation Revolution, at the risk of killing one another; the environs of the derelict factory abandoned by its bankrupt owner. In fact these places gradually blend into one another: the Estrela garden becomes a landscape of forests and rocks and one no longer knows if we are here or there. The ruined factory corresponds to the hospital but also the offices where Vitalina goes to collect her pension. And even the characters themselves swap roles: at one point Vitalina dons a doctor's white coat and in the first person narrates the events that happened to Ventura on 11 March 1975; her dead husband becomes mixed up with Ventura's old rival who now, like Ventura (although which 'now' is this? And is it even him?), is a long-term resident at the hospital. Ventura confuses the memory of a long-ago salary dispute with events that happened to his godson, discovering when he leaves the hospital that the company he worked for has been abandoned, its assets stripped.

But, of course, it is time, above all, which finds itself condensed. The hospital is at once the place where Ventura is currently receiving treatment for the nervous illness which causes his hands to shake incessantly and the military hospital where, one day in spring 1975, the army brought the young Ventura, picked up after a knife-fight with one of his colleagues. It's true that the traumatic memory itself seems to split in two: for the soldiers of the revolution play the role of aggressors before that of healers; and another sequence shows a Ventura dressed in just a pair of red shorts pursued through the night by a military tank, while a soldier takes aim at him. Reality and fantasy, past and present, blur and blend inextricably. Often in cinema, a large time gap is signalled by the use of two actors of different generations. But, of course, Pedro Costa has only one 'actor' to play both the spirited young man with the embroidered shirt and easily wielded knife and the tired old man in pyjamas traipsing down hospital corridors. It's the Ventura of now who must take on the appearance of the strutting cock of then. It's today's Ventura who answers the offscreen questions of yesterday's doctor and who states his age as 19 years and three months before declaring his profession as retired bricklayer. It's this Ventura who responds to the Vitalina of 2014 when she asks him about the young man's forthcoming wedding to fiancée Zulmira, and who engages in an out-of-time discussion with Benvindo, his godson, about the words of a popular song. He has, for all these roles and all these time periods, but one body, that body which has been shaped by the immigrant's hopes and the disappointments, the injuries on the building sites, the terror of the military revolutionaries, the effects of drugs and alcohol. Ventura is neither an old immigrant

GOING UNDERGROUND
In *Horse Money*, Ventura (bottom right) moves between a hospital and a nameless subterranean labyrinth where he meets an old rival, Joaquin (played by Tito Furtado, below), with whom he once had a knife fight; and a recently arrived immigrant from Cape Verde Vitalina (Vitalina Varela, below right)

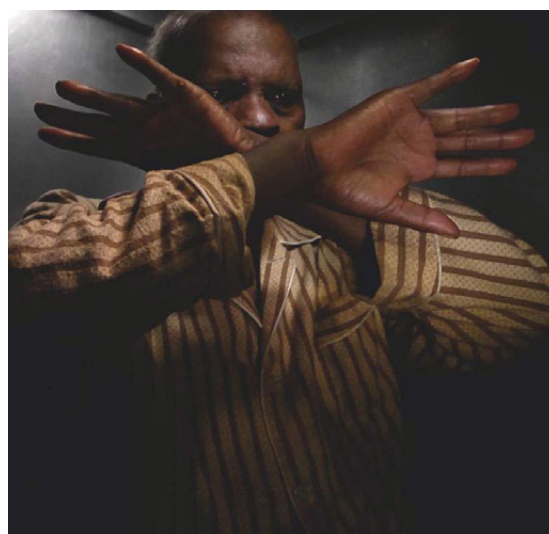


responding to a documentarian's questioning about his life nor an actor playing the part of an old immigrant. He is a man replaying his life, replaying it as the present infused with history: his personal history and that of all those like him, and he has for that just one body, complete with all the marks his life has left on it. This one body, at this one moment, must show the passage of 40 years on the worker's body. In response to that challenge, every single image that Costa produces must show itself capable of containing many others within it.

One can't simply solve the problem by saying that in any case, it's the same thing that happens every time, the same old age beginning from the same youth over and over again for all those born into the wrong half of society. Such cynicism is summed up in Ventura's room – where the gathered grieving form a chorus of slaves – by the words of Tito, who announces, his back turned to the room, that the army won't change anything: "We'll keep on falling from the third floor. We'll keep on being severed by the machines. Our heads and lungs will still hurt the same. We'll be burned. We'll go mad. It's all the mould in the walls of our houses. We have always lived and we will always die like this. It's our sickness." These words seem to say up front all there is to say, and notably the responses which Ventura will give to his invisible interrogator: he knows his sickness and can say with

some certainty that what has happened to him once will happen again. Because this nameless disease includes all the hazards and vagaries of these men's lives: the knife wounds that they exchange and the revolutions that pass them by. At the end of *Colossal Youth*, Ventura and Lento take stock of their lives: Ventura has an identity card, social security and accommodation provided by the council, but at the cost of ending his days there alone. As for Lento, he at least has learnt his love letter by heart. In *Horse Money*, the only letters read aloud are birth certificates or death certificates. In response to the question, "Are you able to read and write?", Ventura says only: "I hear a man crying." And in fact, the whole film seems to be nothing more than one long cry of lament, in which those who lose their lives on building sites far from their native lands take up the words of those who want to make their condition visible to them. For example, the words that Franco Fortini reads before Straub's camera in *Fortini/Cani*: "You are not in that place where your destiny will be decided. You have no destiny. You have not and you are not. In exchange for reality you have been given its perfect appearance, an imitation of life".

But whether we like it or not, isn't the imitation of life precisely the domain of cinematographic art? Isn't the cinema of our time, just as was that of Jacques Tourneur or Douglas Sirk, a privileged site for





Isn't cinema a site for exploring the relationship between real life and ghost stories, whether those ghosts emerge from the past or from another world?

exploring the relationship between real life and ghost stories, whether those ghosts emerge from the past or from another world? And if Straub and Huillet haunt *Horse Money*, it's not on account of these cynical words about the condition of the exploited. Rather it's because they showed us that the song of sorrow was never a simple monody – rather that all of history, as linear as it may appear, contains the possibility of at least two variations. In their work, the lesson about the sadness of those who are nothing is split in two: on the one hand there is the lyrical affirmation that the poor are something and have a voice to say it with, and on the other the dialectical dispute over who is and who isn't.

It's something of this tension that structures the body of *Horse Money* between the lyrical episode in which the song 'Alto Cutelo' accompanies the 'visit' of the camera to the immigrant neighbourhood, and the dialectical episode of the lift in which the aged Ventura and the petrified soldier of the 25 April Revolution confront one another. The song by the Cape Verdean band Os Tubarões, which recounts the fate of those who sold their native land to come to Portugal, ends with an affirmation of a return to the land and the hope of reviving the dried-

THE POWER OF MYTH
Pedro Costa's 2000 film *In Vanda's Room* (top) still looked like a documentary about the residents of Fontainhas, but by 2006's *Colossal Youth* (above), he had dispensed with such realist illusions in favour of mythological reconstruction

out earth. True, this is a song of the aftermath of independence and, when Ventura recovers it in the lift, it lacks its music and its final couplet. The dialectic has apparently sliced through his illusions. It's a strange dialogue, it's true, which takes place in this life. The petrified soldier, covered in golden paint, sometimes shifts position, but he never opens his mouth. His voice comes from elsewhere, a voice which goes beyond him, because it's the voice of the April Revolution: the voice, perhaps, of the children and adolescents who back then believed, as the young Pedro Costa did, in the coming of a new world; the voice, too, of all of Ventura's 'brothers'.

At once, this voice demands of Ventura what he has done with his life, and what he did for this revolution which drove away the fascists and put an end to the oppression of workers here and there. Ventura responds as he always does, with a mixture of truth and lies: he constructed houses, hospitals, schools and museums, it's true. He made a good life, built a family and raised children. To this the voice responds that he is lying: that his existence is miserable and his children are yet to be born – which amounts to saying that they will never be born. But, of course, the accusation turns on itself. Ventura's failure sends the question to the questioner: what did the April Revolution, what did democratic Portugal and its progressive artists ever do for Ventura and his like? It's first and foremost up to them to assess how their promises have turned out, and to recognise that history is not finished, that the real work is yet to begin. The lament for lost youth applies as much to the old tired man Ventura has become as it does to this gold-painted statue, which is all that remains of the great hope of April 1974. It's also why the voices finally become autonomous. No longer does one protagonist address the other. Instead they seem to conduct dialogues with themselves, moving between despondency and hope as do those characters left behind by 'progress' at the end of Chekhov's plays: "The day will come when we'll accept our sufferings. There will no longer be any fear or mystery / We'll leave this world together and they'll forget us. They'll forget our faces / Our sufferings will be joys for all future men."

It's hard to imagine that Ventura is concerned with the joyous future for which his suffering paves the way. But the dialectic – or the exorcism – seems to have its effect upon him. In a scene of reconciliation, we see him playing the good Samaritan, helping his colleague and enemy, incapable of moving his arms, to eat his soup, before gaining his freedom from the hospital, liberated by his doctors. True, he leaves by the door of the dead and in the last shot his shadow mingles with a row of knives spread across the ground. This shadow and these knives on the cobbles seem to have come straight from Fritz Lang. But, through an extreme condensation, the knives also evoke the end of another film, echoing the call to arms issued over a knife-sharpener's grindstone at the end of Straub-Huillet's *Sicilia*. We don't know whether Ventura's ghosts have indeed been exorcised. But we know that the violence of oppression lingers, and that Pedro Costa remains, for his part, faithful to the stance taken by Jean-Marie Straub and Danièle Huillet: that of non-reconciliation. ☹



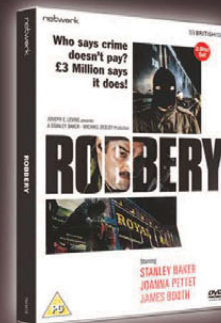
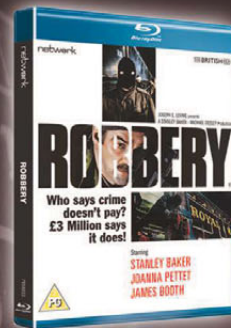
Horse Money is released in UK cinemas on 18 September and is reviewed on page 83

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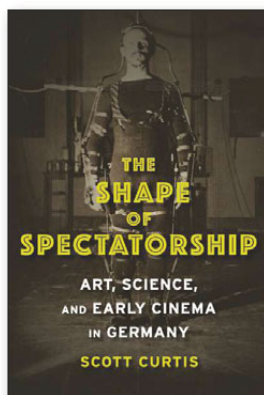
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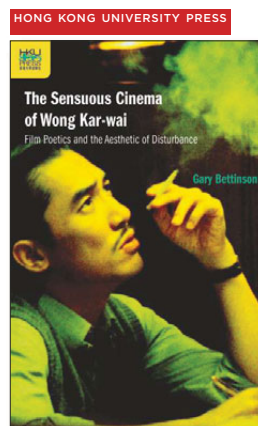
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ANOTHER PLACE ANOTHER TIME

Seven years after her last film, *'The Headless Woman'*, Lucrecia Martel is back at work on another chronicle of existential uncertainty with an adaptation of *'Zama'*, a classic Argentinian novel about a civil servant waiting for his life to change in late 18th-century Paraguay.

Diego Lerer visits the set

A llama under a palm tree on the shore of a lagoon. This unusual image may seem like a geographical anomaly, but Argentinian director Lucrecia Martel assures me it's not, at least not in the world she has created for her new film. She and her crew are based in a hotel overlooking the Chascomús Lagoon, only 80 miles from Buenos Aires—although in the fictional world of *Zama* (based on a novel of the same name by Antonio di Benedetto), the set consisting of llama, palm tree and lagoon stands in for the shoreline of a Paraguayan city never mentioned by name but which we assume is the capital, Asunción, in the year 1790.

Martel is coming to the end of an intense nine-week shoot—involving 52 days of actual filming, complicated by bad weather—in the provinces of Formosa, Corrientes and Buenos Aires. What she's shooting now, based on her own script, is the film's opening scene, in which a prisoner who has been tortured (Jorge Román, the lead in Pablo Trapero's 2002 *El bonaerense*) confesses to an absurd crime in a government office.

As Martel repeatedly adjusts details within the shot

— a hairstyle, the position of a shoulder, the amount of perspiration — and moves the camera minutely, the llama strolls off set, getting dangerously close to the lights and panels that are illuminating the hotel room. But, as if the animal were aware of the boundaries, it stops just before crashing, thereby avoiding chaos. It seems that the animal trainers are aware of every detail.

Martel's concentration on set is such that she is not even aware that the llama has moved off it. *Zama* is her first film since *The Headless Woman* in 2008, and one she waited four years to make. It marks a series of firsts for her: this is her first period film, her first film shot in digital, the first one in which the action has taken place outside Salta — her home province, where she shot her last three films — and her first literary adaptation.

"I have 1,000 things to say against the idea of making a novel into a film," she admits, once the day's filming is over. "But I found a really genuine motive, based on my own experiences and emotions, which made me feel that it was really worth it. *Zama* is a novel about a very different Latin America to the present one, and it transmits a fascination for something that doesn't exist anymore, for a continent that is no longer that way: undefined, diffuse, of immense expanse."

Zama, published in 1956, is a book with a near-mythic status in Spanish-language literature (and the first English translation is due to appear next year, before the film comes out). Though the novel took a few decades to acquire its well-deserved reputation, it has had some illustrious admirers. Jorge Luis Borges said that di Benedetto, "has written essential pages that have touched me and carry on touching me". More recently, Roberto Bolaño called *Zama* "one of the most significant novels I have ever read," and wrote a short story, "Sensini", about a chapter in his own life that related to his mentor di Benedetto.

Martel's choice of *Zama* as her first literary adaptation has a backstory. After *The Headless Woman*, the director was contracted to write and direct a film adaptation of *El eternoauta* by Héctor G. Oesterheld, a sci-fi comic regarded as a classic of Argentine popular literature, which also dates from the 50s. But after Martel had devoted two years of work to it, with the script already completed, the project was cancelled. So she ran away.

"I was running away from not having made *El eternoauta* which, in the version I had written, ended with the survivors escaping via the Paraná river to the north. And I took that same escape route — I took a boat up the river, and there I read *Zama*, which takes place in a neighbouring region. I was coming off a job of almost two years in which I'd had to inhabit a timeframe outside my own present. And the process of travelling to the future or to the past is so fascinating that I was just in the right mood for the novel: that place, that time, that idea of paradise lost. One full of injustice, yes, but with a diversity that has disappeared. There's some of this in the novel, aside from the personal existential circumstances: the continent it described was astonishing — a world where you crossed a river and you didn't know where you were."

Zama tells the story of Don Diego de Zama, a Creole civil servant working for the Paraguayan government under Spanish rule in the last stages of the colonial era. Zama is a man who waits and waits for things that never come to pass: a move to a better location (Buenos Aires or Madrid), news from his family, a salary that's been delayed for months, the sexual attentions of a high-born Spanish lady, recognition of his work, the status of a hero. Over the course of the decade covered by the novel, which is divided into three episodes — 1790, 1794



and 1799 — Zama falls into a spiral of frustration, alienation and self-destruction, which ultimately leads him to attempt one last great feat that he hopes will redeem him in the eyes of his Spanish masters. "What makes the character of Zama modern, and the reason why people still get excited about the book, apart from the quality of its writing, is that he suffers from a malaise that is very current: he thinks only in terms of what the future will bring," says Martel. "I don't know if this contemporary madness, in which the day-to-day has no value, has also been the case at any other time, but in the novel everything is to come. That is Zama's great tragedy. Another interesting thing in the book is to do with the idea of identity as a trap. What is identity in the period when the book is set? Isn't there something absurd about the notion of a Latin American identity?"

The novel's narrative is closer to the French *nouveau roman* and existentialist classics than to the traditional historical novel ("comparable to major works such as *Nausea* and *The Outsider* and in many ways superior to those two books," claimed the great

THE WAITING GAME
In *Zama*, Don Diego de Zama (Daniel Giménez Cacho, above) suffers from the very modern malaise of being obsessed with the future at the expense of the present, falling in love with the unattainable married Luciana (Lola Dueñas, above left)



WADE IN THE WATER
 Lucrecia Martel (below)
 decided to make *Zama* after
 reading the novel following
 the collapse of her previous
 project, an adaptation of an
 Argentinian sci-fi comic

*One thing which
 is very important
 in cinema is
 artifice, or
 representation.
 If you spend all
 your time striving
 to capture a
 specific historical
 reality, then you
 can get lost*



Argentinian novelist Juan José Saer). It's written in a precise, inimitable prose that one would think must have posed an extra challenge in the transposition to the screen. "In fact, di Benedetto's style of writing is what makes it easy to envisage the novel being translated cinematically," says Martel. "Because his language is so radically inventive, it somehow frees you from a lot of things; it nourishes you and it encourages you to create. I thought it'd be interesting to turn Zama's paranoia inside out – to see the world through his eyes and find visual ways to transmit that state of mind. Let's see if it works."

Zama is played by the Mexican actor Daniel Giménez Cacho, who Martel has admired since she saw him in Arturo Ripstein's *Deep Crimson* (1996). Throughout the various stages of his agonising wait, he's accompanied by the Spanish actress Lola Dueñas, the Argentine Juan Minujín and the Brazilian Matheus Nachtergaele. This mixture of nationalities is in part the outcome of a multinational co-production – the Argentine production company ReiCine and Brazil's Bananeira Film, together with another nine countries, including the Almodóvar brother's El Deseo, Patagonik and Gael García Bernal's Canana – but it is also a way of underlining the region's miscegenation and cultural blendings at that time, when Castilian, Portuguese and Guaraní were mixed in with dozens of indigenous tongues, to the extent that the notion of a national identity seemed an unrealisable goal.

Given the rich cultural mix that existed, Martel was keen not to fall into the academicism of some literary adaptations of the colonial period. "I tried not to use pure Spanish as the language of the bourgeoisie," she explains. "They all have different accents from the interior and some speak Guaraní. To me that pure Spanish sounds very much like *los héroes de la patria* [heroes of the fatherland]. All that heroic past and brave macho stuff makes me ill. And this is a novel whose protagonist is very alert to his desire, which is not a very masculine thing." Other radical ideas pertaining to the *mise en scène* are noticeable on the set: not using candles or fire to cast light, for example ("I didn't want the ease they provide, I wanted to

force myself to think"), as well as the lack of any reference to the Catholic church. "There's not one crucifix in the film. I wanted to show a vision of the past that is not mediated by the involvement of the church; it's like an exercise to see if we can manage to find something else in this world."

This is also the first film in which Martel has had a male lead. "Zama is a male character, but I don't know if he is masculine or feminine," she explains. "I do identify more with him than I do with *Alien's* Lieutenant Ripley if I'm honest, even if it pains me to say so. Working on this character brought me closer to the worst in me, and reaffirmed my belief that the best in someone can be found in exactly the same place. That idea, repeated 1,000 times, that in order to find yourself you need to get lost, is true."

As night falls on the set, the cold outside draws everyone on the team into the small room where Martel, her Portuguese director of photography Rui Poças (*Tabú, To Die Like a Man*) and her sound recorder Guido Berenblum control what's going on in the next room with their walkie-talkies and monitors, and occasionally by passing through a small door, which makes them duck each time, hitting their heads more than once. The seminaked prisoner carries on relating his crime, for hours it seems, to a point where it's not clear if the person asking for mercy is the actor or his character. He waits, as Martel waited for so many years, and Zama even more so: for that instant to be *the* instant, for this film to be the film that all of them have dreamt of making.

Two days after finishing the shoot and still clearly moved by it, Martel confirms that impression. "The end of the shoot was worthy of a soap opera," she tells me. "We were all crying. I had never experienced seeing so many people so moved. The effort it took making this film, more so bearing in mind how wretched making this kind of cinema is... We felt as if we were undertaking a heroic mission. I hope our experience, like Lisandro Alonso's *Jauja*, is useful in showing that travelling to the past doesn't necessarily need a huge budget."

In a sense, it seems curious that Alonso and Martel, two of the most representative filmmakers of the New Argentine Cinema that emerged two decades ago, and which at the time staked its claim to being a cinema that drank from the well of everyday life, are today making period films with international casts.

"Our generation was not against period or genre cinema," explains Martel. "We were young, and in order to make our way in the world we started investigating our familiar or regional surroundings, which were the most accessible. The local film language was empty then and everything had to be given a little bit of a shake. But you change. I always worked with [professional] actors, but Lisandro was one of the most resistant [to using them], and I'm sure that after working with Viggo Mortensen he opened up a wonderful world to himself. And especially to one thing which for me is very important in cinema, which is to say artifice, or representation. If you spend all your time striving to capture a specific historical reality, then you can get lost. I think that is cinema's big weakness: wanting to pretend to be true when, on the contrary, one of its huge strengths is the possibility it allows of giving yourself to fiction." 📞

Translated by Mar Diestro-Dópido

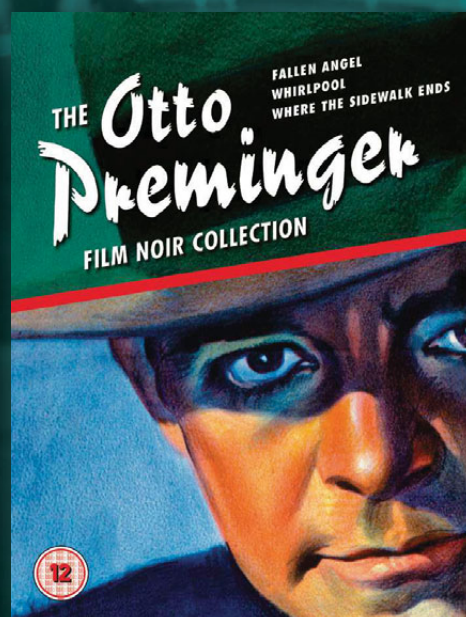
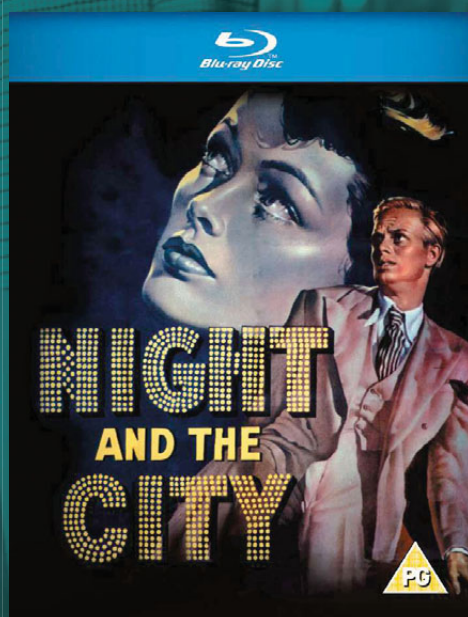




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PROFILE

MARGUERITE MON AMOUR

As scriptwriter, director, star, Marguerite Duras created a unique, poetic body of film. Why, then, do we see her work so rarely?

By Thirza Wakefield

La mer, la mère, la lumière. If I were asked to describe the films of Marguerite Duras in three words, it would be these I'd pick.

Words seem an apposite place to start when describing this novelist-turned-filmmaker, who was born in French Indochina in 1914 and died in Paris 19 years ago. For Duras, who had had 14 books published before she directed her first film in 1967, words retained their essential nature, remained as text rather than vitrifying into pictures when she made the transition from a (nominally) non-visual medium into a visual one.

It isn't simply that Duras never ceased to be a writer – scripting all her films, frequently adapting from her fiction, stage and radio plays – but that she felt that film underestimated its need for text. She believed that cinema could not contend with the fecund indeterminacy of the word, and must for its own sake embrace it. The “boundless

potential of text”, as she called it, “the unending proliferation of its images” underlay every film she made. And contrary to Benoît Jacquot's judgement that Duras “detested cinema”, her 19 films resound with enjoyment – the enjoyment of testing her estimation of what was necessary to cinema's self-fulfilment. It was because of this negligence – cinema's disparaging of the spoken word, as she saw it – that Duras became a filmmaker in the first place. That, and her reaction to others' adaptations of her work, which she found “unbearable”, betraying her novels “to an extent”, she said, “I could never have thought was possible.”

Duras was practised in writing for film before trying her hand at directing, and – given the difficulty of getting hold of her films – we're likely to encounter her first as screenwriter, in particular through her screenplay for *Hiroshima mon amour* (1959). Directed by Alain Resnais, the film tells the story of a love affair between a Japanese architect (Eiji Okada) and French actress (Emmanuelle Riva) which, because of her imminent return to Paris, is over before it's begun. The pair's acute awareness of the absurdity of their affair consigns it to a kind of no man's land, the couple discussing how soon they will forget it even as it unfolds. Resnais conveys this confusion

in their relationship at the opening of the film, segmenting the physical act of love into close-ups of their enmeshed bodies and cutting away to footage of the aftermath of the bombing of Hiroshima. This dismemberment is accentuated by the breach between sound and image: though the lovers aren't seen to be speaking, they are heard in voiceover, he refuting her tendered memories of the destruction of his city.

Though the film is more kinetic and attentive to continuity than Duras's directed features would be, *Hiroshima* established several techniques that would typify her filmmaking. The dialectic between ‘He’ and ‘She’ and the uncoupling of picture and speech – a principle repeated in Marin Karmitz's short *Nuit noire Calcutta* (1964), which Duras also scripted – were of Duras's devising. And while Resnais directed, a reading of her play-script makes clear that he fulfilled her stage directions almost to the letter. But more

Many of Marguerite Duras's characters are casualties of stasis. They are pulled every which way but forward



Oh Calcutta: Marguerite Duras (right) with Delphine Seyrig on the set of *India Song* (1975)

than this, *Hiroshima* set a tone – in its weighing of the affair as something and nothing, and in the female character's experience of the liaison as refracted through the lens of another. This earlier, forbidden affair with a German officer in Nazi-occupied Nevers came to an unexpected end with his death. 'She' wishes the affair's white-flash intensity had finished her, too; had killed her, as the explosion of the bomb 'Little Boy' killed at Hiroshima, leaving nothing behind but a shadow.

Riva's 'She' is a Janus, looking behind and ahead of the now; she cannot live in the moment. As such, she is precursor to Anne-Marie Stretter, the heroine of Duras's *India Song* (1975), and a creation for whom Duras felt a deep and abiding affection. "I'm always moved when I talk about Anne-Marie," she told the critic and novelist Dominique Noguez nearly a decade after the film's release. "She spreads the word that life is unliveable." This paradox is typical of Duras, many of whose characters – the great majority female – are casualties of stasis. There is a torpor born of the contrarities of their physical and emotional circumstances. They are pulled every which way but forward. It is hard to put one's finger on what it was about Anne-Marie, in particular, that endured for Duras, but perhaps it's that this "angel" – as the filmmaker referred to her – put one foot in front of the other; got the better of her inertia, albeit by committing suicide. This does not mean that Duras was morbid or nihilistic; rather, that Anne-Marie is a martyr of what Duras considered to be a common condition of female experience: rarefaction as a result of internal conflict.

India Song, shot for less than £30,000 at the abandoned Palais Rothschild in the Bois de Boulogne, is set in a French embassy in Calcutta in the 30s. The dead day darkens its porticos and the cries of a beggar-woman carry from the grounds into the drawing room. It's here that Anne-Marie atrophies, spoils like fruit in the monsoon heat, stifled by the ruling class she married into. Presided over by men, the outpost makes no provision for its women, of whom only Anne-Marie is seen. In a manner reminiscent of *Hiroshima mon amour*, her love for the vice-consul at Lahore is conflated with large-scale atrocity: the leprosy permitted to devastate the indigenous population. As in *Hiroshima*, this necrotising love can come to nothing.

Pieced together from long, slow pans, the film tells us within the first five minutes that Anne-Marie killed herself. But rather than moving backward in time to detail the days before Anne-Marie's death – which she is shown to spend dancing, turning like a figure on a mirrored music box – the film seems to throw out time altogether. In *India Song*, what has happened and what is about to happen are made of the same stuff: like chiffon on chiffon, they show through each other.

This liquid layering of past on present on future reflected Duras's filmmaking process. She worked as a painter works, building up colour on canvas. As she perceived it, a film could not be broken down into constituent scenes; a film was entire. She told *Film Comment*'s Jan Dawson in 1975, "The meaning of a shot is, for me, the direction it takes, the direction it causes the next shot to take, and the direction it continues to take even after it's been superseded."



Didier Flamand and Delphine Seyrig in *India Song*

Adding to this sense of overlapping is what Duras called *le voix off* – a technique she would use time and again. Its effects are similar to those of the narrative voice of certain essay films – Chris Marker's *San soleil* (1983), for example, uses a removed, meditative narration that bears no direct relation to its image-track. The discourse between them, however, bears fruit in the viewer's imagination. Similarly, Duras's *voix off* coats the action of *India Song* with images not seen but evoked by the spoken word. The *voix off* of Duras's film *Le Camion* (1979), spoken by Duras herself, uses the perfect conditional tense to describe the film she would have made, about a female hitchhiker who catches a lift with a lorry driver. This is not the film we watch, yet it exists in the mind's eye of her audience. As Duras repeatedly asks her co-star Gérard Depardieu, "Do you see?" "Yes, I see," he returns. Duras's *voix off* films thus folds one way of seeing upon another.

India Song's non-synchronous soundtrack combines several unidentified voices, all female. These voices were pre-recorded and the 'spoken scenario' played to Duras's cast as they acted. The effect of this playback induced in the actors "a sort of simultaneous absence/presence", as Duras put it, and lent to Delphine Seyrig's Anne-Marie "a distracted quality, which derived from [her] physically listening – listening with her whole body". It's rare for a director to impose on her actors so rigid a working method, but here it paid dividends. Seyrig's rapt performance has her seem suspended in the plush, colonial-era interiors of the embassy, and yet planted on her feet.

Why, then, these three words to sum up Duras's work? One might justly be drawn to desire (*désir*), despair (*désespoir*), or two other near-homophones, as they are in the French, death and love: *l'amour* and *la mort*? Why not these, since they recur throughout her *oeuvre*, since Anne-Marie dies of impossible desire, and the disembodied voice of Aurélia in *Aurélia Steiner (Vancouver)* (1979) speaks in succession of sex and her mother's death in childbirth?

Love and despair – the preoccupations of her films and literary fiction – are absolutes for Duras: pure, knowable, resisting description. The sea, light and her mother, on the other hand, contained multitudes; they could be many things at once. Light had in it night and day. The sea was expanse, had volume; it washed clean and was dumped into; drank the run-off of man's cruelty. Duras's mother, who raised her alone upon the death of Duras's father when she was seven, was the only woman she knew growing up, and was not the woman she wished to be.

These things were the rhythm of lived experience, not so much subjects as the materials of her filmmaking. As the moon's pull is manifest in the motion of the tides, the caprices of light and sea are indicative in Duras of an imperial, parental power that is possession by emotion. Duras was having a love affair with language. This love she brought to bear on her films, a director dedicated to innovation and to the imagination of the viewer, whom she felt had been deserted by commercial film and failed by "the phenomenal prostitution of the cinema by capitalism".

So why has her work slipped from view? The praise it elicited from the ablest critics should tell us something of its importance. Molly Haskell was inspired by *India Song* – her review was entitled 'The most feminine film I've ever seen'. Following its premiere at Cannes, Pauline Kael called *Le Camion* "perfectly made" and was equally taken with its maker: "somehow – God knows how – she manages to make her own pictures, her own way."

Kael's bafflement would not be out of place speaking of a female director today. Sadly, we are not much further on in having our women filmmakers speak as they would choose. Duras's films were outspoken, freed from extraneous influence. We should listen again. ☺



Truck stop: Duras with Gérard Depardieu, filming *Le Camion* (1975)

HISTORY WOMAN

From hardcore to hair metal to gutter punk, Penelope Spheeris's *Decline* trilogy dissects LA's post-punk music scene

By Nick Pinkerton

Movies, for the most part, take too long in coming together to keep pace with pop music – this was true 35 years ago, and it's certainly true today, when internet hype descends on scenes with locust-like rapacity and whole genres are born and disappear in the span of days. Even the best efforts at taking the measure of what's going on tend to arrive after the spot has already been blown – take for example *Urgh! A Music War* (1981), which catches Pere Ubu and Devo after they've started to stumble.

An exception – maybe the exception – is *The Decline of Western Civilization*. Penelope Spheeris shot the film between the fall of 1979 and the spring of 1980, using equipment checked out from her music videography company Rockin' Reel. When it was released the following year, it became something of a communiqué to the wider world, or at least the major cities where it screened, disseminating the breakneck brand of punk rock, played by bands like Black Flag and The Circle Jerks, that was emerging from the dowdier outer precincts of Los Angeles – a kind of music later codified as 'hardcore'. (This was about as far as you could get from Spheeris's day job of shooting then-popular yacht-rock acts such as the Doobie Brothers.)

That *Decline* would become a singular pop-historical document is a fact that no one could've predicted at the time. Spheeris wouldn't get so far out ahead of the curve again: 1988's *The Decline of Western Civilization II: The Metal Years* recorded the short-lived hair metal scene from its epicentre on LA's Sunset Strip; ten years later, *The Decline of Western Civilization Part III* partied with squatter gutter-punks begging for change on the Strip. Each subsequent 'sequel' steadily moves the focus from performers to fans, while all three films ask to what degree the road of excess leads to the palace of rock 'n' roll. The trilogy is now available on home video, for the first time since the VHS era, in a four-disc set from Second Sight, overseen by Spheeris and her daughter and collaborator Anna. (The fourth disc is all Special Features, including the filmed interviews presented in their original form, edited selectively for content.)

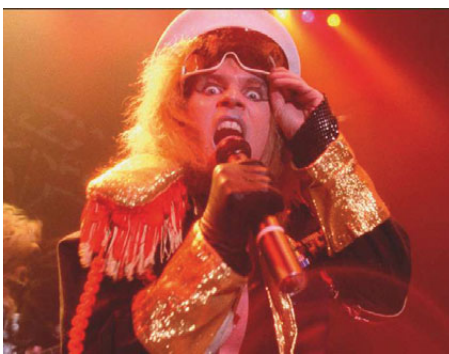
Where many of the bands seen performing in the first *Decline* would become part of the narrative of US rock/pop history, the performers in *The Decline of Western Civilization Part II: The Metal Years* are a bunch of also-rans. The irony is that the hardcore kids in the first *Decline*, with minimal expectations for the professional prospects of what they were doing, in many cases made careers out of punk rock, while the metal kids with their sights set on nothing less than champagne jam superstardom, well... Although she secured interviews with by-then legendary (and mostly post-rehab) figures from the first late 60s/early 70s hard-rock/metal boom – Alice Cooper, Ozzy, Lemmy, Aerosmith's 'Toxic



This is hardcore: Black Flag's Greg Ginn in the original *The Decline of Western Civilization* (1980)

Twins' Tyler and Perry, and KISS's Paul Stanley, speaking from a pile of groupies – Spheeris's actual onscreen performances come from third-tier acts like Seduce, Odin and London, whose rendition of their 'Russian Winter', preceded by an unsuccessful attempt to burn a hammer-and-sickle flag, is an identifiable lowlight.

Though it is more recent than its predecessor, *Decline II* feels in some respects more distant, like a dispatch from another universe. For the most part, we have some contemporary idea of what 'punk rock' or 'hardcore' music was and is – putting aside for the moment the question of its continued vitality or innovation, its influence and its aesthetics are still with us. And so, perhaps, is hair metal, in disguised forms – such as novelty party music, from Andrew W.K. to LMFAO, or in a "party like a rock star" posture that has largely migrated to hip-hop. For the most part, though, we might be looking at a disappeared Amazonian tribe here,



Metal band Lizzy Borden in *Decline II* (1988)

One suspects that for every night of unchecked hedonism there are a dozen long, dark nights of the soul

inhabiting Sunset Strip venues like the Rainbow Bar and Grill and the since-defunct Gazzarri's.

While Spheeris is certainly intrigued by the stratospheric aspirations of the Strip kids, she's less interested in the music that the glam/hair bands produce as a kind of accessory to their lifestyles – or at least what they represent those lifestyles to be while the camera is rolling. (One suspects that for every night of unchecked hedonism there are a dozen long, dark nights of the soul.) After giving perfunctory stage time to various tarted-up, cokehead-skinny cock-rockers, *Decline II* arrives at its headliner, Megadeth, with frontman Dave Mustaine's blue-collar work-



Gutter punks in *Decline III* (1997)

ethic and no-frills self-presentation offered as something of an antidote to the theatrical flounce and slovenly musicianship that preceded.

Spheeris is a blunt, to-the-point interlocutor – “Why do you wear pants that don’t got no butt in them?” she asks Odin vocalist Randy Roberg of his trademark assless chaps. She’s given to recycling the same questions from film to film and subject to subject, “What do you see yourself doing in five (or ten) years?” being a particular favourite – the prompts aren’t much, but her brusque, humorous manner invariably gets people talking, and that’s the crucial thing. Practically everyone in *Decline II* predicts a future of fame and fortune for themselves, while practically everyone in *The Decline of Western Civilization III* sees an unmarked death and potter’s field ahead. (If in nothing else, they are united by a passion for blackout alcoholic oblivion.)

The *Decline III* kids range in age from their teens to their mid-twenties, living communally in abandoned real estate scattered around Greater LA. Their circumstances are not far from those depicted in *Suburbia* (1984), Spheeris’s punksploitation fiction follow-up to the first *Decline*, made for Roger Corman’s New World Pictures. Apart from performances by The Resistance, who boast the distinction of being LA’s only *actually* homeless squatter-punk outfit, the musical interstices in *Decline III* all seem to have been shot at a single, totally inconsequential gig at the Showcase Theatre in Corona, California. (It’s not clear if any of the squatter subjects are even present in the pit.)

From the ground-zero reportage of the first *Decline*, Spheeris has spiralled out to a scene of maximum self-imposed marginality. There were still interesting things going on in punk and its various offshoot idioms in the mid-to-late 90s, but none of them are to be seen here – which isn’t to say that what has been documented isn’t poignant in its way, encapsulating as it does the political naivety and backward-looking obsolescence of US gutter punk, which borrowed heavily from UK street punk style, all liberty spikes and triangle studs and trousers held together with GBH and Exploited patches. (The kids here even favour flashing the V-sign over the all-American middle-finger.) Spheeris caps her trilogy by returning to hardcore punk after the initial jolt of energy has migrated elsewhere, leaving behind only warmed-over nihilistic attitudes, and an audience of broken, self-loathing, often endearing wastrels. In the *Decline* films, at least, history is written by the losers. ☹



Director Penelope Spheeris

PRIMAL SCREEN THE WORLD OF SILENT CINEMA

Whether adding colour or whitewashing scandal, the feminine touch was essential to early Hollywood



By Pamela Hutchinson

When we look at women’s achievements in film, the stories of stars and directors make a splash. But in the silent era, sheer numbers speak almost as loud as isolated biographies. Until the end of the 1920s, women’s labour supported the American film industry at every conceivable level, saving the business from the brink more than once.

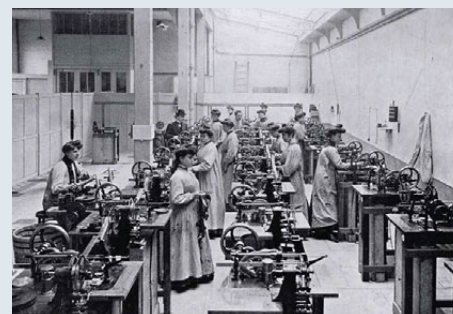
At the beginning of the 20th century, in workshops in Paris and New Jersey, the largest group of women in the film business were those doing the painstaking job of hand-colouring prints – the ‘hens of Pathé’. It was a skilled job, but there were vast quantities of prints to be produced and the set-up was often more assembly line than atelier. Productivity was boosted by the use of stencils and a ban on conversation during working hours.

Within a few years, women were taking on less skilled but more visible work. As part of efforts to make cinema more respectable, previously shabby ‘Nickelodeons’ in America’s inner cities hired female staff in prominent positions, as front-of-house managers and box-office girls, conveying the impression that the films showing were suitable family entertainment. Women were also found beside the screen, providing musical accompaniment of variable quality – a mean-spirited trade magazine article of 1911, created a piano-player called ‘Lily Limpwrist’.

It worked: the cinema shed its unwholesome image enough to appeal to the middle classes, particularly women, giving the industry some desperately needed security. Significant shifts followed. In 1915, the *Motion Picture Supplement* reported that “one may not name a single vocation in either the artistic or business side of its progress in which women are not conspicuously engaged”. Most women working behind the scenes were in the “manless Eden” of the scenario department: from young hopefuls who sent their stories to studios on spec, to secretaries promoted to script clerks, and massed ranks of readers scanning novels, plays and scripts for potential, screenwriting was largely women’s work. Graduates of the system included Frances Marion and Anita Loos, but the screenwriter Frederica Sagor Maas had some tough experiences: “I would work so hard on some of the scripts and the minute I’d turn it in, someone else would take credit for it... Unless you wanted to quit the business, you just kept your mouth shut.”

Women were writing around the screen as well as for it. Grace Kingsley was hired by the *Los Angeles Times* in 1913 to pen the first weekly newspaper column on the movie business, and on both sides of the Atlantic

Female voices in the movie press eased the trauma of Tinseltown scandals



The ‘hens of Pathé’, hand-tinting films

women were among the first film critics, from the *Manchester Guardian*’s C.A. Lejeune to Irene Thirer at the *New York Daily News*, who introduced the concept of star ratings.

In Hollywood, fan magazines were arguably more important than papers – and they spoke directly to women. The magazines employed a high proportion of female journalists, and staged an intimacy between stars and the female audience via profiles, interviews, in-the-know gossip, fashion advice and glamorous picture spreads.

In 1920, women made up 60 per cent of the US movie audience – rising to a giddy 83 per cent in 1927. This feminised film culture was, for a time, essential to Hollywood’s survival. As the business courted female fans, starry-eyed teenage girls took to showing up outside studios hoping to be discovered. But stories of the ‘extra girls’ soon descended from wish-fulfilment fairy tales to ‘casting-couch’ horrors. The model-actress Virginia Rappe had more success than many a would-be star, but when she died in a San Francisco hotel room in 1921, in the company of Roscoe ‘Fatty’ Arbuckle, there was a messy scandal. The fallout included the establishment of the production office, whose head Will Hays immediately saw that women could fix his industry’s PR problem.

Female voices in the movie press eased the trauma of Tinseltown scandals, as they had in 1920 when they presented Mary Pickford’s divorce and remarriage in a favourable light and kept her fans onside. But there was more thorough work to be done. Throughout the 1910s and 20s, middle-class women volunteered as censors and joined organisations such as the Better Films Movement, advocating for wholesome entertainment; Hays sought them out. In 1917, a group of industry women, including Pickford and the director Lois Weber, had established the Hollywood Studio Club, a safe ‘dormitory’ for aspiring starlets. Hays expanded its premises in 1926, and founded Central Casting as a route for actresses to circumvent the couches of unscrupulous producers.

In the 1900s, women added commercial value to films by hand-applying dyes to prints; in the 1920s they did it by giving the finished product the stamp of feminine approval. Female voices were indispensable to the film industry for as long as it craved propriety – and no longer. ☹

MARX AND RECREATION



Double whammy: the Marxist academic David Harvey (right-hand screen) in Isaac Julien's *Kapital*

The scale of this year's Biennale swamped its political intentions, but some artists remembered that revolution could be fun

By John Beagles

In Isaac Julien's two-screen video *Kapital* (2013), shown at this year's Venice Biennale, he interviews the Marxist academic David Harvey, author of *The Enigma of Capital*. Harvey remarks that the problem with capital is that it is like gravity, in that "you can really only intuit that [it] exists by its effects". This is capital's blessing – intangibility, along with speed, enables it to evade objective analysis; as Harvey wryly remarks, for artists to represent it, "You have to be pretty quick these days".

The question of how to grapple with capital's abstracted immateriality and to map its effects and workings lay behind much of the work on show in Venice. The primary site for the attempt to represent the unrepresentable was 'All the World's Futures', the Arsenale component of the Biennale, held in the city's old shipyards, which was curated by Okwui Enwezor. In the catalogue Enwezor wrote that he hoped to offer a filter "through which to reflect upon both the

current 'state of things' and the 'appearance of things'. Gathering 136 artists from 53 countries, Enwezor's aim was to offer a plurality of voices in a "parliament of forms", which would collectively capture the elusive contours of life in an "age of anxiety". The hope was to enable the viewer to make sense of "the current upheaval", in which "everywhere one turns new crisis, uncertainty, and deepening insecurity across all regions of the world seem to leap into view."

Unsurprisingly, the show's avowedly political tenor prompted accusations of art-world hypocrisy and bad faith, in both the popular and the art press. Writing in the *Observer*, Laura Cumming said the show was "nothing if not explicitly critical of capitalism, consumerism and filthy lucre while relying upon them all for its very lifeblood" (Julien, for instance, has received funding from Rolls-Royce). Meanwhile, J.J. Charlesworth, writing at artnet.com, claimed that "underneath all the political posturing, what it really represents is a bad case of disavowal – of not wanting to admit that you're part of a system that is the problem, not the solution."

While criticism of art-world blindness and hypocrisy, and questions about the efficacy of 'political art', are hard to dismiss, the critical zeroing-in on Enwezor's show was in itself revealing. The Arsenale show is

only part of the Biennale, not the main event, outnumbered by solo shows of artists in the national pavilions. This tacit acceptance by the critics of the primacy of the curator over the artist, in part a reflection of their own disputes about cultural gatekeeping, was all the more perplexing given how hit-and-miss the curation was, in basic physical terms – particularly the video and film work shown in the Arsenale and in the pavilions at the Giardini.

The space and duration that film and video require create particular difficulties when they have to be accommodated in a group show. The presence of 136 artists in the Arsenale (half as many would still have been too much) militated against serious, extended engagement with individual artists for anyone who didn't have the luxury of a whole week at the Biennale. Nowhere was this clearer than in a well-intentioned homage to the late Harun Farocki. The seminal documentarist's films were shown in two forms – a bank of TV monitors built into the walls of the space demonstrated the volume of his practice, but for the viewer was a stultifying, formal dead end (you couldn't choose what to watch); while a chronological screening of his entire catalogue in a separate cinema made viewing his work overwhelming and impossible. Consequently, Farocki's essential

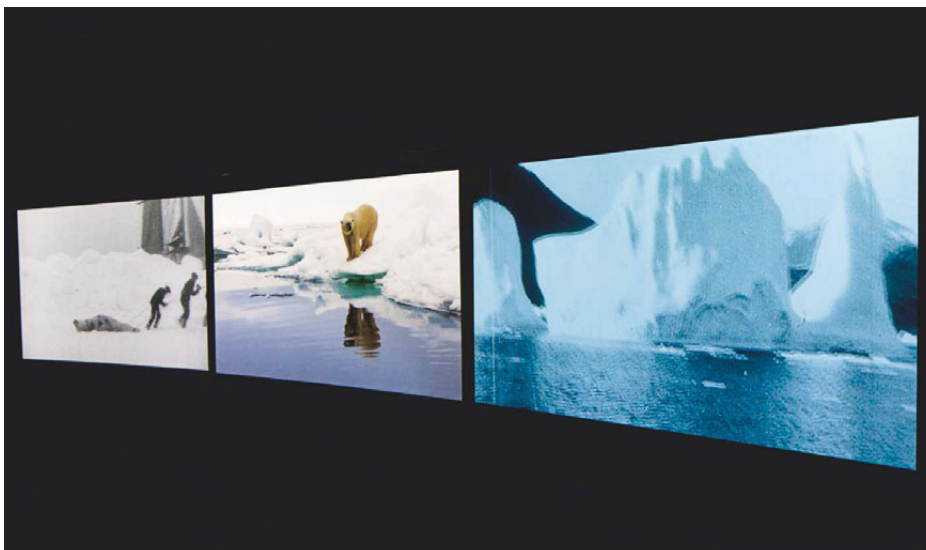
As with many previous Venice shows, it felt as though the curation had reduced artists' work to illustrative props

works on capital and labour had little more than a token 'political' presence in the gallery.

This was one example among many: it was impossible to view Julien's *Kapital*, Fatou Kandé Senghor's *Giving Birth* and Chris Marker's *Owls at Noon Prelude: The Hollow Men* properly because of audio and light bleed, while the show's excessive scale meant that cognitively exhausted viewers were faced with demanding works by artists such as Sonia Boyce and Mika Rottenberg. As with many previous Venice shows, such as Hans Ulrich Obrist's 'Utopia Station' (2003), it felt as though the curation had reduced artists' work to illustrative props.

This was a shame, because there was plenty of stimulating work. For instance, John Akomfrah's three-screen, 45-minute piece *Vertigo Sea*, subtitled *Oblique Tales of the Aquatic Sublime*, although very poorly displayed, was an at times deeply moving visual and sonic poem, lyrically and elegiacally invoking the animal and human ghosts of the oceans. In a non-linear narrative, Akomfrah's "recycling aesthetic" combined spectacular BBC natural history footage, historical imagery of hunting, and fictionalised episodes featuring actors in Victorian garb, to produce an absorbing meditation on the ocean as a site where capital's forces historically and continually intersect in what is sometimes a bloody and brutal conflict. Akomfrah's recontextualised archive footage of whaling and the hunting of polar bears at the turn of the century was especially sharp – its grainy, 'amateurish' quality juxtaposed with the slick, spectacular drone glide of the BBC HD footage was jarring, rendering the misery and horror of humanity's collective extermination of whales extremely raw. Just as stark were the sections showing the hell of slave ships and the terror experienced by 'illegal immigrants', represented in one deeply upsetting section featuring footage of 1970s boat people desperately fleeing a sinking ship. Like Akomfrah's historical work, such as *Handsworth Songs*, this was aesthetically stimulating, sharp and politically complex, repudiating the notion that art with a political bent is naturally anti-aesthetic.

Outside the Arsenale, other artists succeeded in demonstrating that the coexistence of critical content and aesthetic pleasure isn't a contradictory state for 'political art'. In the German pavilion, Hito Steyerl's video installation *Factory of the Sun* (2015) created an immersive environment for the viewer to watch her 'film essay' – slumbering in deck chairs, bathed in the neon light of a 3D motion-capture modelling grid. The sensation of being stuck in a digital loop of passivity and stimulation was unsettling. The film itself, structured like a computer game, was a comprehensive composite of contemporary digital landscapes – spaces where the ever-increasing colonisation of the digital by capital vies with its inherent utopian potential for collectivity and expanded consciousness



Triple echo: John Akomfrah's *Vertigo Sea: Oblique Tales of the Aquatic Sublime*

(something pointedly referred to in the film's psychedelic language – "Our machines are made of light"). It flipped between shards of 3D exploding light bulbs, mundane 'real' images of actors rehearsing their deaths for motion capture, satirical sci-fi newsfeeds covering the use of drones by corporations to assassinate 'rebels', and a funny adolescent dig at Deutsche Bank – in which an actor complains, "So you want me to play the Deutsche Bank guy like a Nazi in the computer game *Wolfenstein 3D*?" Most importantly, Steyerl's film used a recent viral internet sensation, a man using the alias Forsythe who dances in his basement to the music of Parovoz (26 million hits to date). The subsequent transformation of his dancing into 3D avatars by Japanese youth was used by Steyerl as a symbol of digital culture's still inchoate potential as a site of resistance and collectivity. As the film accelerated to its finale, the house beats became more percussive and infectious and an ever-mushrooming digital army of Forsythe avatars filled the screen – becoming a viral freaky-dancing legion. The allegorical potential was fairly clear, as was the necessity of the centrality of pleasure within any politics of resistance (as the Russian feminist Emma Goldman said: "If I can't dance, I don't want your revolution"). Unusually, within the context of the Biennale, the work was also uplifting. While much political art remains relationally defined by its negative

response to capital, Steyerl always retains a faith in human agency to go beyond its limits.

In the Spanish pavilion, *The State of the Art – a performative essay*, by the duo Cabello/Carceller, shared Steyerl's understanding of the subversive, transgressive importance of pleasure within any politics of resistance. Cabello/Carceller's conversational narrative presented a group of 'youths' exchanging ideas and opinions about, among other things, the problems of not fitting in and – more significantly – not wanting to fit in. Wandering in limbo within an architectural 'non space' (the Biennale pavilion out of season), these four "try outs", as they were referred to, were coded as representing the kinds of marginal, dissident sexualities and identities (transsexual and ethnic 'immigrant' lesbian) who would doubtless experience a less than warm welcome in today's increasingly homogenised work and entertainment spheres.

Clearly informed by queer theory, post-colonial and feminist critiques, *The State of the Art* exhibited a penetrating understanding of the politically subversive potential of a post-humanist embrace of shifting identities. This assumed affecting form in the film's finale, in which the protagonists paid homage to the disco diva, Dalí muse and eternal shape-shifter Amanda Lear, performing their own defiant version of Lear's 'I'm a Mystery' in front of a banner that stated "Drag is political". As with Steyerl's film, this finale was uplifting and affecting in its defiant expression of political resistance.

Numerous writers, most recently Franco Berardi in his book *Heroes*, have referred to the way technology creates echo chambers – social and cultural spaces where people only hear their own thoughts, ideas, tastes and opinions reflected back at them. The art-world's echo chamber is well documented, and nowhere more obvious than in Venice, home of the original ghetto. But in the work on show this year, there were at least vital signs of new forms desiring to be empathic, communicative and popular (but not populist) – and, perhaps most importantly, aiming to redefine exactly what 'political art' might look like. 📍



A screening of Harun Farocki at the Arsenale

i The Venice Biennale runs until 22 November. www.labiennale.org

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A FITTING TRIBUTE TO
AN INSPIRATIONAL
FIGURE"**

ALLAN HUNTER, SCREEN DAILY



THE GUARDIAN

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A FILM BY WIM WENDERS AND JULIANO RIBEIRO SALGADO



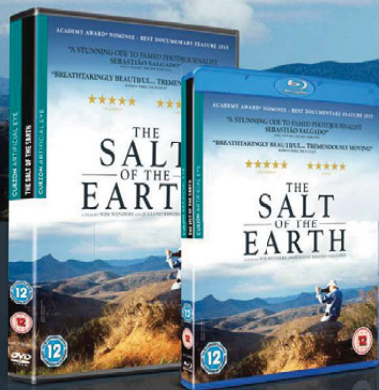
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**"ANOTHER MASTERFUL, MULTIFACETED FEATURE ...
THE JOURNEY IS OFTEN CHALLENGING, BUT THE REWARDS – HEADY, EMOTIONAL,
PROVOCATIVE AND INVIGORATING – ARE ENDLESS."**
KEITH UHLICH, TIME OUT NEW YORK

**"AN ADMIRABLE TESTAMENT TO THE SIGNIFICANCE OF ART,
AND A STIRRING DEMONSTRATION OF ITS INDOMITABILITY."**
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Reviews



95 **Straight Outta Compton**

F. Gary Gray's sweeping biopic positions N.W.A. as sharp documentarians of a culture they lived and breathed, rather than the band of thugs and agitators the mainstream media cast them as



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Irrational Man

USA 2015

Director: Woody Allen

Certificate 12A 95m 0s

Reviewed by Adam Nayman

The irrational man in Woody Allen's new film has a given name and a list of grievances as old as Genesis. Welcomed with open arms by his new colleagues at the liberal East Coast university where he's been hired to teach philosophy, Abe Lucas (Joaquin Phoenix) keeps them at a distance because he's too depressed to make small talk. And when he does make small talk, it's mostly about being depressed, and about the literary precedents that allow for such a dour outlook. A lifetime of imbibing and recapitulating Kierkegaard and Nietzsche has left him convinced of God's absence and the insignificance of his own existence – which, given his heavy drinking and willingness to demonstrate the principles of Russian roulette to a roomful of students, is not likely to go on for much longer anyway.

The means by which Abe procures a new lease on life (and a restarting of his stalled sexual mojo) are dark, to say the least. *Irrational Man* joins *Crimes and Misdemeanors* (1989), *Match Point* (2005) and *Cassandra's Dream* (2007) in the small but significant subcategory of Allen films that take murder as their subject (as does 1993's *Manhattan Murder Mystery*, though in a much lighter vein). In press interviews for *Irrational Man*, Allen has joked – if indeed he was joking – that he was wont to lie awake at night thinking of elegant ways to kill someone.

Whether this marks him as a Hitchcock fan or strangely morbid is a question for living rooms and internet comment sections everywhere. It's tempting to see Abe, who in a moment of clarity commits himself to a plan to dispatch a corrupt judge – and finds himself finally able to perform sexually in the aftermath – as a vague analogue for the writer-director who created him. The revelation that the potential victim's misdeeds include mishandling a bitter custody case pushes the connection even further – of all the transgressions Allen could have whipped up to give Abe a motive, this one is rather judiciously chosen.

The twin rituals of critics reading Allen's films as personal testaments and the director denying it are ancient stuff, but *Irrational Man* is still creepy to contemplate. It's about a morally equivocating man whose heart wants what it wants, and who then, after being found out by somebody close to him, starts thinking about adding another skeleton to his closet. Abe clearly gets off on withholding, and he's so good at sublimating his guilt that nobody around him can tell he's got a secret burning a hole in his back pocket. These frissons exist in the film, but they're heightened by what viewers are bringing with them to the cinema – which for many people will be the certainty that they're paying to see nothing less than a veiled but on-the-record confessional.

The tension between the seething misanthropy of the screenplay and the half-speed languor of the filmmaking is fascinating in an abstract way. In a film where every character, no matter how minor, has little trouble articulating how they feel, standard notions of dramatic realism just don't seem to apply. The question of whether this curiously emptied out atmosphere



Love and death: Joaquin Phoenix as philosophy professor Abe and Emma Stone as student Jill

is evidence of late style or laziness applies equally to other master filmmakers in their 70s, from David Cronenberg to Michael Mann, and it's complicated by the fact that Allen has always foregrounded stylised narrative forms over naturalism, from his faux-Greek playlets to the embedded literary anthology structure of *Deconstructing Harry* (1997).

With this in mind, the flatness of Abe's exchanges with a lusty fellow professor (Parker Posey) or his semi-platonic courtship of a bright young student (Emma Stone) who's attracted to his rancour could thus be taken as a pared-down delivery device for the big ideas Allen is trying to put in play – as evidence of an Apollonian rigour. But just as Abe's lectures seem to be little more than Philosophy 101, *Irrational Man* plays the Greatest Hits of Existentialist Thought – “As Sartre said, ‘Hell is other people’” – without ringing any really snappy variations on them. When Stone's Jill discovers that Abe has been

scribbling suspiciously in the margins of his copy of *Crime and Punishment*, it's an apt analogy for the film's screenplay, which a snarky professor might comment resembles a student's best attempt at Dostoevskian fan fiction.

The desultory intellectualism of the references, combined with an almost total lack of credible dramatic motivation or interpersonal



Phoenix with colleague Parker Posey



have been built around their lead rather than simply cast – he at least fights the role to a draw.

The same cannot be said of his co-star. While Stone's Jill has a well-defined arc – she starts as a sounding board for Abe's miseries and ends up the arbiter of his ethical failings – the actress can't quite convince us that the character is in the throes of a schoolgirl crush or a moral crisis. In *Magic in the Moonlight*, Stone's outsized, anime-eyed charm was smartly marshalled in a part that was all put-on, but here it seems more that the director is kidding himself – and not on purpose. Leaving aside the palpable boredom of another avid, available undergrad in the Allen filmography – remember that Annie Hall went back to school to “meet all kinds of interesting professors” – Jill is a cipher, and Allen's decision to give her an intermittent voiceover only points up how unpersuasive her voice really is. Jill's horror when she realises that her mentor and lover is a Raskolnikov figure is probably meant to seem abrupt – the sort of sudden 180 that follows a piece of unprocessable information – but the overall lack of modulation renders it oddly comic (as if the actress, rather than the character, is gobsmacked).

Irrational Man has its share of bad scenes – the ones between Jill and her understandably miffed boyfriend (Jamie Blackley) are all clangers – but Allen deserves credit for the impressively scary staging of a late, violent confrontation which sticks in the mind well beyond the glib *deus ex machina* that renders it null and void (it's the flipside to the gimmicky ending of *Match Point*, except that here the fates are acting more generously). In fact, there's enough hovering menace in the concluding, quasi-thriller-like sequences to suggest that Allen's one-liners about Leopold and Loeb were more than just throwaways. Just because *Irrational Man* isn't very good doesn't mean that it can't be a revelatory work. Every film offers evidence of its maker's desire to create, but this one would seem to be a work of genuine compulsion. **S**

Two decades after his junior Christopher Walken-isms in 'To Die For', Phoenix is a worthy successor to Daniel Day-Lewis in the actor-as-event category

interactions, marks *Irrational Man* as a failure – albeit one with its share of qualified successes. Phoenix's slouched, shoe-gazing comportment is as much a piece of rigorous physical acting as his more stylised turns for Paul Thomas Anderson, and, like Owen Wilson in *Midnight in Paris* (2011), he manages the tricky feat of playing somebody with Woody-like qualities without mimicking any of his director's vocal or physical mannerisms (he's like the anti-Kenneth Branagh in this regard). But where Wilson gave his film a lift by applying his characteristic surfer-boy surprise to a scenario where his character had good reason to be stunned, Phoenix lets his posture and line readings sag in the middle. Two decades after his junior Christopher Walken-isms in *To Die For*, Phoenix has become a worthy successor to Daniel Day-Lewis in the actor-as-event category, and while it's harder to tell how meticulously he's being directed here compared with his work for PTA – whose recent films

Credits and Synopsis

Produced by
Letty Aronson
Stephen Tenenbaum
Edward Watson
Written by
Woody Allen
Director of Photography
Darius Khondji
Editor
Alisa Lepselter
Production Designer
Santo Loquasto
Supervising Sound Editor
Robert Hein
Costume Designer
Suzy Benzinger

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Production Companies
Gravier Productions

presents a Perdido
production
Executive Producers
Adam B. Stern
Allan Teh
Ronald L. Cheez

Cast
Jamie Blackley
Roy
Joaquin Phoenix
Professor Abe Lucas
Parker Posey
Rita Richards
Emma Stone
Jill Pollard
Betsy Aidem
Jill's mother
Ethan Phillips
Jill's father
Tom Kemp
Judge Spangler

Dolby Digital
In Colour
[2.35:1]

Distributor
Warner Bros. Pictures
International (UK)

Rhode Island, present day. Philosophy professor Abe Lucas arrives at Braylin University to teach an undergraduate course; his lectures inspire student Jill Pollard, who develops a crush on the new professor. Abe and Jill become close friends and confidants, much to the chagrin of Jill's boyfriend Roy, who in turn starts to push her away. Abe tries to begin an affair with Rita, a married professor, but he can't perform sexually. At a campus party, he attempts suicide by playing Russian roulette with a loaded gun. Just when he is at his lowest point, he and Jill overhear a woman complaining about the judge overseeing her custody battle; convinced that the judge is an evil man, Abe resolves to murder him. He carries out his plan without arousing suspicion – except from Jill, whom he is now seeing romantically. She is shocked, and when another person is arrested for the crime, she threatens to go to the police. Abe tells her to give him a few days, which he uses to plot her murder. He tries to throw her down an elevator shaft but slips and plummets to his death.



The man who would be king: Michael Fassbender as a Macbeth you'd follow into battle but wouldn't want to be ruled by

Macbeth

Director: Justin Kurzel
France/United Kingdom/Luxembourg 2015

Reviewed by David Jays

"How many children had Lady Macbeth?" was once a shorthand scoff at pointless academic enquiry. Yet artists continue to pick at Shakespeare's puzzles, and that question animates Justin Kurzel's notably intelligent, visually arresting film. The Macbeths are childless, but Lady Macbeth refers to suckling a child. What happened? Kurzel (the Australian director of 2011's *Snowtown*) begins his film with their baby's funeral: the pale corpse laid on bracken, with lichen-scabbed stones placed over its eyes, as Macbeth (Michael Fassbender) crumbles dirt on the lifeless index of his hopes. He and his wife (Marion Cotillard) stand silently among black-shawled mourners; so too do the three uncanny women who will wrap up the couple's fate.

Macbeth continues to be catnip to filmmakers. Even as this new movie premiered at Cannes in the spring, it was reported that Martin Scorsese

was planning a documentary based on Kenneth Branagh's production (seen in Manchester and New York in 2013-14). The most celebrated films inspired by Shakespeare's tragedy were sharpened by the unsparing rigours of the mid-20th century (Orson Welles in 1948, Kurosawa Akira's *Throne of Blood* in 1957, Roman Polanski in 1971). Now, Kurzel anchors it in his stars' charisma and the tight knots of their characters' psyche. The baby's untimely death provides a motive on which Fassbender and Cotillard seize. Seemingly hollowed out by grief, the Macbeths allow ambition to take the place of love. Macbeth greets the witches' prophecies of greatness without joy, and their warnings of doom without surprise. When his men return from battle, some are met by a joyful child leaping into their arms; not Macbeth, and he registers the absence. His wife leads a children's choir to welcome King Duncan to their castle, her childlessness heightened by this uncomfortable proximity.

Cotillard has previously made a virtue of female characters' lack of agency – never more than in the desperate pursuit of *Two Days, One Night* (2014). Her Lady Macbeth is a performance of great containment and delicacy. In demure

braids, she invokes spirits before candlelit pictures of imps and torments. As queen, she's tricked out in pearls and a swathe of blue eyeshadow, but her husband retreats from her. She can only spit lines from the play's sleepwalking soliloquy at him, as a heedless warning – "What's done cannot be undone", "Hell is murky!" Cotillard doesn't actually sleepwalk; she merely gives voice to everything she has held in for so long.

Fassbender is frequently cast for sad-eyed decadence (*Shame*, *12 Years a Slave*), but he has a remarkable gift for breaking faith. From his



Marion Cotillard as Lady Macbeth



Kurzel's comfortless medieval setting is arresting. This Scotland is one of harsh exteriors... the bleak, dank beauty contains surreal shimmer and real violence

aftermath (dogs lapping at the dead, a traitor despatched by firing-squad arrows). And the young are its victims – Macbeth peers at a fallen youth, another son he never had, who will later return in his imagination.

Cinema allows filmmakers to shove the supernatural into the spectacular – Polanski and Leonardo Henríquez (*Bleeder*, 2000) are among those who have pushed hard on this hallucinatory pedal. But Kurzel remains restrained, and most of his trickery lurks at the corner of your eye. His witches aren't puff-of-smoke hags but three women and a little girl who appear silently at moments of crisis, watching battles or funerals with solemn faces before simply stepping back into the mist. Macbeth spots them at the fringes of the battlefield and looks back at them with a sorrowful recognition. Similarly, the spectral dagger that leads Macbeth towards assassination is held by the dead boy from the battlefield, who is then swallowed by the braziers' smoke.

The camera sways, as if blown by the wind in an unstable world. Kurzel doesn't cut the text as much as Kurosawa did, but his Scottish-accented cast mutter rather than declaim, and visuals are more eloquent than vocals. It's a film rich in gesture. As they plot murder, the Macbeths whisper intently, brow to brow, and their hands find flesh under thick layers of clothes: assassination as aphrodisiac.

David Thewlis's weak-chinned King Duncan mostly skulks in a saffron-lit tent. Macbeth's household assembles to greet him exactly as the troops earlier lined up before battle, in an ominous echo. In Shakespeare's text, the murder happens off stage but here we see frantic butchery: Duncan wakes as Macbeth presses a hand over his mouth and rams in his blade again

and again. Wet-eyed Fassbender makes it an act far more grieving than gleeful, and afterwards lies beside his bloodied victim. He doesn't flee the scene; instead, Kurzel audaciously has him challenge the king's son, Malcolm (Jack Reynor), who finds him squatting defiantly beside the corpse, staring down reproach. When the young man weeps, Macbeth skewers the tear with a dagger – a tipping point into tyranny.

Shakespeare's shortest tragedy, concise and bloody, has tempted numerous filmmakers, and many have shifted it into a gangland setting (starting with Ken Hughes's *Joe MacBeth* in 1955). The first rush of the plot's action, following Macbeth from hero to assassin, is a swift progress. But Macbeth's unravelling is often also the play's – it's difficult to maintain the thrilling momentum as the hero closes his mind and distils his actions to cruelty – and it's a problem for Kurzel. Fassbender reaches for the tropes of the screen sociopath – sudden giggle, solitary brooding, skipping. "Full of scorpions is my mind," he says, then offers a big grin. He gives it the full barking dictator in the banquet scene and then trots off, barefoot in his nightshirt, to consult the witches.

Kurzel maintains tension by bearing down on tactile moments. At Macbeth's coronation, we see holy water drip down his brow as blood did previously; the nobles kiss his hand, but Paddy Considine's suspicious Banquo refuses to press lip to flesh – a slight in a world of palpable allegiance. As with the assassination, Kurzel has Macbeth brandish his crimes publicly – his hero is perhaps longing to be deposed in turn – so that the wife and children of his rival Macduff are not killed at home but burnt alive at the stake as an example to his cowed subjects (including Cotillard, kneeling and weeping). His prolonged final confrontation with Macduff – hack, punch, headbutt – ends with the victor sitting, drained, beside the fallen, as Macbeth did earlier with the king. Polanski's version famously closed with the king's younger son Donalbain (cut from Kurzel's film) seeking out the witches and restarting the cycle of violence. Here it is Banquo's son, the boy Fleance, who stomps out of the orange fog, takes a sword and hurtles towards Malcolm's castle, a boy hellhound rushing into the future. **S**

early turn as a seductive stepfather-figure in Andrea Arnold's *Fish Tank* (2009), his candid round eyes and wolfish grin hold trust and treachery in the balance. You'd follow this Macbeth into battle, recoil from his rule.

Kurzel began his career as a theatre designer, and his comfortless medieval setting for *Macbeth* is arresting. This Scotland is one of harsh exteriors: moody, foggy, cold to the bone. As in Jonathan Glazer's landscape in *Under the Skin* (2013), the bleak, dank beauty contains surreal shimmer and real violence. The moors are wrapped in mist, flattened by cloud, and so, so dreich. At Macbeth's primitive encampment, the walls offer little barrier to the wind, and rain falls through the murder scene ("A little water clears us of this deed"), while the score by the director's brother Jed Kurzel foregrounds a slow, rusty scrape of strings.

The battle scenes are a slaughterous churn. Many of the soldiers are frightened boys, their cold faces smeared with sooty camouflage. Kurzel lights the heavy fog like the orange mouth of hell, and the edit cuts sharply between a roaring tumult and a slow-mo hack-and-slash. It's a brutal scrum with an unsentimental

Credits and Synopsis

Produced by
Iain Canning
Emilie Sherman
Laura Hastings-Smith
Screenplay
Todd Louisa
Jacob Koskoff
Michael Lesslie
Based on the play by
William Shakespeare
**Director of
Photography**
Adam Arkapaw
Editor
Chris Dickens

Production Designer
Fiona Crombie
Composer
Jed Kurzel
Sound Mixer
Stuart Wilson
Costume Designer
Jacqueline Durran

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Films production
See-Saw Films
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assistance of Film4
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National Lottery
through Creative
Scotland

Executive Producers
Tessa Ross
Olivier Courson
Danny Perkins
Jenny Borgars
Bob Weinstein
Harvey Weinstein

Cast
Michael Fassbender
Macbeth
Marion Cotillard
Lady Macbeth
Paddy Considine

Banquo
Sean Harris
Macduff
Jack Reynor
Malcolm
Elizabeth Debicki
Lady Macduff
David Thewlis
Duncan
David Hayman
Lennox
Maurice Roëves
Menteith
Ross Anderson
Rosse

James Harkness
Angus

In Colour
[2.35:1]

Distributor
Studiocanal Limited

Medieval Scotland. Thethane Macbeth puts down an uprising against King Duncan. After the battle, he and his friend Banquo encounter three witches, who predict that Macbeth will himself become king. In partnership with his wife, Macbeth decides to assassinate Duncan and take the throne. Duncan's son Malcolm goes into exile.

As king, Macbeth becomes increasingly tyrannical. The witches also predicted that Banquo's descendants will become kings, so Macbeth has his friend murdered – but Banquo's son Fleance escapes.

After Macduff, another disaffected noble, leaves Scotland, Macbeth has his wife and children burnt at the stake. Macbeth and his wife, formerly united by the death

of their baby and their joint ambition, now begin to grow apart.

Macbeth is tormented by seeing Banquo's ghost at a feast. He visits the witches, who tell him that he should beware Macduff; that no one born of woman can defeat him; and that he is safe until Birnam Wood appears at his fort in Dunsinane. He is reassured, despite Lady Macbeth's insanity and death. But the prediction is fulfilled: Malcolm and Macduff approach Dunsinane, their soldiers holding blazing branches from Birnam, and Macduff, who was delivered by caesarean rather than "born of woman", kills Macbeth. As Malcolm prepares to take the crown, the young Fleance appears, holding a sword.



A dangerous affair: Colin Farrell as John the servant and Jessica Chastain as Miss Julie, the baron's daughter he seduces

Miss Julie

Norway/United Kingdom/Ireland/
France/Canada/USA 2014

Director: Liv Ullmann, Certificate 12A 130m 12s

Reviewed by Nick Pinkerton

If all American literature is made of tributaries of Mark Twain's Mississippi and, as Dostoevsky had it, the whole of Russian literature came from under Gogol's overcoat, then in the same spirit we might say that modern Swedish drama was cooked up in the kitchen where August Strindberg's *Miss Julie* (1888) takes place. Strindberg died in 1912, though not before the first adaptations of *Miss Julie* and *The Father* had gone before the camera, a development that no doubt interested their author; a playwright, novelist, memoirist, essayist and painter, he was also fascinated by photography, and had even invented a 'camera' which imprinted images (Celestographs) on photographic plates without lenses. Long after Strindberg's death, his influence on the emerging national cinema would be inestimable. "Strindberg," Ingmar Bergman would say, "has generally been my companion throughout life, alternately repelling and attracting me" – and it is in this combative spirit that Liv Ullmann has created her strife-racked *Miss Julie*.

Miss Julie is the fifth feature-length work by Ullmann, Bergman's long-time collaborator and – in her previous film, 2000's Bergman-scripted *Faithless* – the executor of his legacy. (She is Norwegian, and it transpires that she settled on Strindberg only after failing to launch a film of *A Doll's House* by her countryman Henrik Ibsen.)

The most immediately evident change made to Strindberg's play in this go-around is that the action has been moved from Sweden at the turn of the last century to Northern Ireland at the same time (the film was shot on location at Castle Coole in County Fermanagh). Strindberg's central trio are still here: Jean (now John), the valet with arriviste fantasies and a taste for imported wines, is played by Colin Farrell; Miss Julie, daughter of the baronial manor who surrenders her maidenhead to 'the help', is played by Jessica Chastain; Kathleen, the cook and John's fiancée, is played by Samantha Morton. What transpires between John and Miss Julie over the course of a reckless night touches on the antagonism between classes as well as between sexes – Miss Julie has the disadvantages of a woman and the advantages of an aristocrat, John the opposite package; Kathleen, a liminal character, is connected to each by solidarity to the weaker class and sex. (That Ullmann's most recent high-profile success was a stage production of Tennessee Williams's *A Streetcar Named Desire* starring Cate Blanchett,

another canonical theatre piece concerning the pedestal-toppling power of desire, must certainly have helped to prepare her for *Miss Julie*.)

The adaptation is Ullmann's own, and it has been done with purpose and intelligence. The action, confined to the manor's kitchen in the play, has been opened up to incorporate the servants' quarters and the grounds of the estate – the latter features in a sort of overture in which we see Miss Julie as a little girl wandering among the greenery, as well as in a coda in which we follow her in her final walk out of the kitchen door, concluding in a rapturous image that suggests the pre-Raphaelites. Unlike Alf Sjöberg's 1951 production, Ullmann's *Miss Julie* has no recourse to picturesque peasantry or incidental characters – we are trapped with the trio, who are trapped with each other. (Sjöberg's film was shot by one Göran Strindberg, a relation – the parochial smallness of the Swedish industry cannot be overstated.) All references to Miss Julie's previous betrothal, to her or Jean's bloodlines as keys to their actions and to her reckless boldness being occasioned by menstrual madness have been heavily altered or removed altogether.

Strindberg's dramas of this period tend to be structured as a slow simmer built to a boiling-point – at the Brooklyn Academy of Music I saw an Alan Rickman production of Strindberg's 1889 play *Creditors* with Tom Burke and Owen



Strindberg, who once wrote that the female of the species was 'useful only as ovary and womb', is what the young folks like to call a 'problematic' figure

Teale in which the entire cast appeared to be on the verge of thrombosis by the time the curtain was ready to fall – and Ullmann's *Miss Julie* is, similarly, a harrowing affair, not to mention much the most bibulous version of the material I've seen, with the judgement-impairing effects of each dram visible on the way to overflow. It's a gladiatorial encounter, and by the red-eyed end of John and Julie's sleepless night, you have the feeling of looking at people who've been crawling on hand and knee through rending thickets.

However antagonistic Bergman's relationship with Strindberg may have been, there must inevitably be an additional wrinkle to Ullmann's reckoning with *Miss Julie*, for Ullmann is of course a woman, and anyone who has read her autobiography *Changing* knows she's a woman acutely aware of the particular challenges of the female artist. In contending with Strindberg, Ullmann is approaching a sworn enemy of her sex. Molly Haskell, in her groundbreaking 1974 study *From Reverence to Rape: The Treatment of Women in the Movies*, encapsulated the general consensus when she referred to Strindberg as a "legendary misogynist", and although this necessarily succinct judgement simplifies the author's rather more complex and contradictory opinions, it's sufficient to say that the man who once wrote that the female of the species was "useful only as ovary and womb" is what the young folks today like to call a 'problematic' figure. But, as Haskell observed, it is often the director who loves or worships women who's most to be suspected, and in voicing and interrogating his own fear and hostility towards women in a Victorian society that claimed to revere them despite a great deal of evidence to the contrary, Strindberg tacitly challenged the myth of the 'weaker sex', revealing the barely suppressed violence governing male-female relations. In expressing his own misogyny, he also exposed that of society at large, and gave the whole game away. None of which is to reclaim Strindberg as any sort of feminist, but only to say that he was an artist of the first order, and a hypersensitive medium for truths whose full implication future generations would wrestle with. Such a contentious, irascible artist demands not cautious, faithful interpretation but confrontation, and he has found his match.

Ullmann, with her Russian cinematographer Mikhail Krichman (*Elena*, *Leviathan*), gives a masterclass in *mise en scène* determined by the rigid social system of decorum – the physical

toll exerted by violating it; the momentary, emboldened giddiness that follows the overturning of taboo; and the dangerous, unforeseeable psychological after-effects of the upending transgression, which removes the keystone holding together an entire worldview. Under the hard, fixed gaze of Chastain's Miss Julie, Farrell's John can at first only nervously dart his eyes this way and that, and he has a marvellous moment early on when, invited to enter the main hall of the manor by Miss Julie, he stops dead at the threshold as if bouncing off a force field. It's an instant to be treasured, along with Chastain's unsteady, wounded walk after her deflowering; or her first, abject drop to the kitchen floor, a marionette with strings clipped. Both performances are what is described as awards-worthy, which is perhaps why the US distributor thought to dump *Miss Julie* into the December scrum, where it disappeared without trace. The same absurd, unexamined prejudices against 'filmed theatre' that dogged Bergman throughout his career may also have played a part in the dismissal of Ullmann's film – but there isn't a better piece of pure cinema out there.

Credits and Synopsis

Produced by
Synneve Hersdal
Oliver Dungey
Teun Hille
Written by
Liv Ullmann
Adapted from
August Strindberg's
[play] *Froken Julie*
Director of Photography
Mikhail Krichman
Editor
Michal Leszczylowski
Production Design
Caroline Amies
Sound Design
Stefan Henrix
Costume Design
Consolata Boyle

Companies
Maipo Film, The
Apocalypse
Films Company,
Senorita Films and
Subotica present
in association with
Media House Capital
and Altaris Partners
Norwegian Film
Institute with the
participation of
Bord Scannán
Na hÉireann/The
Irish Film Board
and Northern
Ireland Screen
Executive Producers
Julia Balaeskoul
Nusseibeh
Aaron L. Gilbert
John Raymonds
Christian Baumard
Alain Kappauff
Paul Zischler

Peter Garde
Lutz Heineking Jr
Bastie Griese
Marco Gilles

Cast
Jessica Chastain
Miss Julie
Colin Farrell
John
Samantha Morton
Kathleen
Nora McNamary
little Miss Julie

In Colour
[1.85:1]
Distributor
Munro Film Services

An estate in Northern Ireland, Midsummer's Eve, 1890. John, valet for the baron of the estate, and his fiancée Kathleen, the cook, convene in the kitchen to discuss the scandalous behaviour of the baron's daughter, Miss Julie, who has insisted on dancing with John as part of the Midsummer's Eve festivities while her father is out of town. A high-spirited Miss Julie barges into the kitchen and waylays John, while Kathleen is consigned to her chambers. Alone with Miss Julie, John confesses that, as a boy, he had been in love with her. They verge on intimacy but John, remembering his position, recoils, until finally the arrival of revellers drives the pair into John's chambers, where she loses her virginity to him. They return to the kitchen, where John outlines a plan for them to run away together. Miss Julie is appalled by his sudden cool pragmatism and lack of romantic ardour. They carry on drinking through the night, forming and discarding plans of action, before retiring to their respective rooms in the morning. Kathleen gives John a dressing-down and commands him to get ready to come to church. While John is in the kitchen, Miss Julie comes in with her father's purse and her pet canary, the only things she intends to bring along on their elopement. John decapitates the bird, sending Miss Julie into a tailspin of grief. Kathleen departs for church, and the baron, home from his journey, calls for John. Returning to his livery and subservient role, John suggests that suicide is the only solution for the dishonoured Miss Julie. She leaves the manor to follow his advice.



Samantha Morton as the estate's cook Kathleen, John's fiancée



Last day on earth: Willem Dafoe in the title role of Abel Ferrara's fictional reconstruction of the last 24 hours of Pasolini's life

Pasolini

France/Italy/Belgium 2014

Director: Abel Ferrara

Certificate 18 84m 11s

Reviewed by Adrian Martin

In what initially appears to be a fairly banal moment in Abel Ferrara's new film, the great Italian director Pier Paolo Pasolini, as incarnated by Willem Dafoe, begins leafing through the newspaper. We notice particular headlines and stories concerning violent incidents, murders, the corruption of police and politicians. Then images flash up to illustrate these items: a gun fired in a street, dead bodies, fleeing cars... But whose images are these? Are they unfolding in Pasolini's mind, or are they more truly Ferrara's, 'taking off' (in a manner Pasolini himself once theorised as the 'cinema of poetry') from a depicted character's subjectivity, in order to lead us to an ambiguous and vacillating plane of representation?

Certainly, the Ferrara style is unmistakable, here as everywhere in *Pasolini*: the ever-wandering camera that racks focus at will (but nonetheless never fails to pick up what is essential in any scene); a constant use of slow dissolves between scenes and locations, sometimes in tandem with slow motion; dreamy passages of nocturnal driving... But there is energy and lucidity here: after the disappointment of *4:44 Last Day on Earth* (2011) and the embarrassingly amateurish career nadir of *Welcome to New York* (2014), *Pasolini* marks a welcome revitalisation of Ferrara's creative juices, not

seen in such full flow since *Go Go Tales* (2007).

In the face of an almost impossibly daunting subject – since there are so many scholars, fans and specialists, each zealously guarding their own image and interpretation of Pasolini – Ferrara returns to the mosaic approach that he perfected in *Mary* (2005): a collage, intermingling various types of material in furiously compressed form.

At the same time, Ferrara and co-writer Maurizio Braucci (also a collaborator with Matteo Garrone) wisely impose a constraining control factor on this material, a relatively straightforward, overarching structure: roughly, the last 24 hours of Pasolini's life, with brief additions from a few days either side of the fatal date of 2 November 1975. Painstaking research led to this 'final day' chronology – aligning the film, in Ferrara's mind, with the preparatory work and observation of reality in his recent documentary work.



Ferrara's realisation of *Porno-Teo-Kolossal*

The special, artistic payoff of this reconstruction, however, is also unmistakable. Alongside all those moments (of the kind usually so heavily underlined in biopics) where Pasolini appears to be forecasting his own tragic death ("You do not even know who, in this very moment, is thinking about killing you"), there are just as many scenes that are entirely undramatic and touching in their homeliness: Pasolini interacting with his beloved mother Susanna (Adriana Asti, former actor for Pasolini and Bertolucci, now in her eighties) and his friends; or on a makeshift soccer field, energetically kicking the ball around with a bunch of young guys. Ferrara also includes – countering another occlusion rife among biopics of creative people – scenes of his hero humbly labouring at his typewriter or reading; this art does not simply spring, fully blown, from his head on to the page or screen.

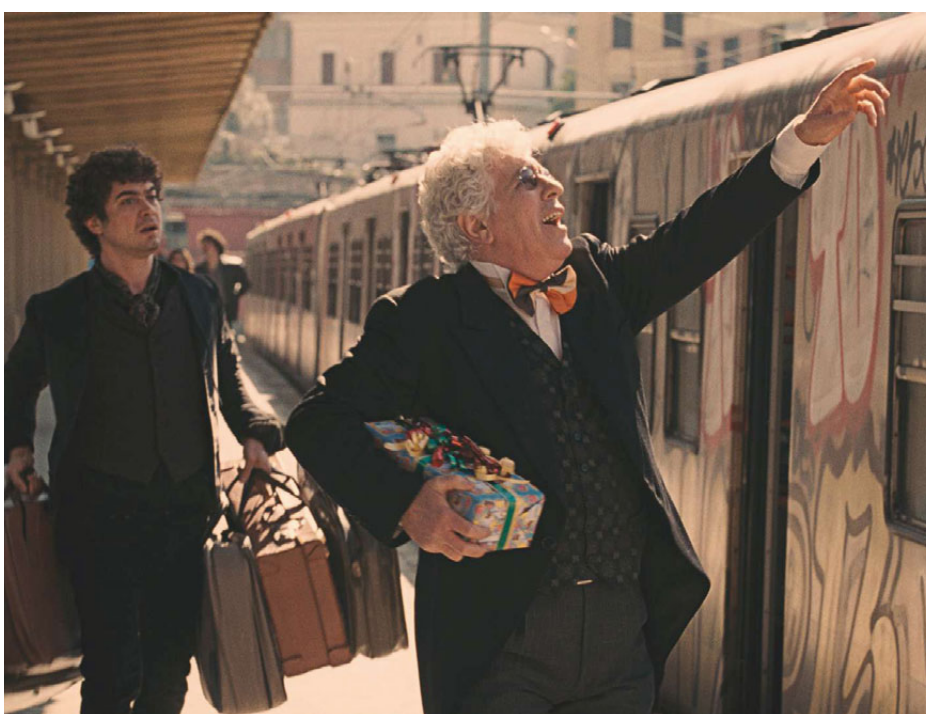
And yet, another essential aspect of Ferrara's cinema is also given free rein here, within the script's predetermined structure: the tendency to generate mental imagery, in the form of novelistic fiction or cinema, as a psychic projection from deep within a person's complex, inner self – another manifestation of Pasolini's cinema of poetry concept. Relatively lengthy sections of the movie are devoted to Ferrara's materialisation of passages from two of Pasolini's unfinished works: the novel *Petrolio* ('Oil') and the screenplay *Porno-Teo-Kolossal* – a cynical but magical fable that would have countered the crushing bleakness of *Salò*. A highlight of Ferrara's version of the screenplay is an immense casting

coup: where Pasolini's former 'eternal child' Ninetto Davoli was once to play the secondary role in this scenario, now, in his mid-sixties, he becomes the wide-eyed hero Epifanio.

These re-enactments produce a welcome *détournement*, a meandering in Pasolini's tightly linear structure. They also allow effects of interweaving and slippage between the different levels of the collage: Pasolini's words, in a letter to Alberto Moravia, then become those of a sage-like storyteller inside the fiction of *Petrolio*, addressed to its "repugnant" central character – yet so much the author's alter ego – Carlo (Roberto Zibetti), which then triggers another, dreamlike tale-within-the-tale...

Despite Ferrara's insistence that he and his key crew are devout students of Pasolini's cinema, he applies the lessons of this apprenticeship freely, without mimicry. Ferrara no more tries to ape Pasolini's filmic style (with its disconcerting discontinuities and jarring facial close-ups) than Dáfoe tries to imitate the real Pasolini. The project is honest: Dáfoe does not try, for the most part, to speak Italian; and Ferrara eschews the riot of allusions to Pasolini's classics (*Accattone*, *Medea*, etc) that would have easily suggested themselves. Only the selection of pre-existing music tracks – Tony Joe White and The Staple Singers alongside Bach, Rossini and a Croatian folk tune – seem to tip the hat to the Master; but then again, haven't Ferrara's films always displayed eclectic musical taste, effortlessly crossing high and low cultural realms?

Ferrara also explores the type of narrative atmosphere that has appealed to him at least since the magisterial *King of New York* (1990): full of what anthropologists call 'thick description', with naturalistic details evoking subsidiary stories and undercurrents left floating, unexplained. Although Braucci insists this is not a project for 'insider' viewers with an already comprehensive knowledge, many names are fleetingly dropped – such as (Miklós) Jancsó or Eduardo (De Filippo) – and little intrigues are flagged but not unfolded, such as the evident



Riccardo Scamarcio as the young Ninetto Davoli, and Davoli himself as Epifanio

tension between Pasolini's gregarious friend Laura Betti (Maria de Medeiros) and his cousin Nico Naldini (Valerio Mastandrea). More obscure still, even for those viewers with some familiarity with Pasolini, is the implicit connection drawn between the subject matter of *Petrolio* – the 1962 death of Enrico Mattei and its relation to

Ferrara insists that he and his key crew are devout students of Pasolini's cinema, but he applies the lessons of this apprenticeship freely, without mimicry

the ENI oil corporation (already dramatised in Francesco Rosi's 1972 *The Mattei Affair*) – and one popular hypothesis about the ultra-rightwing culprits behind the director's murder, involving intermediaries from the Sicilian Mafia. It is this link that helps us understand Ferrara's creepy scene (derived from *Petrolio*) of a Masonic-style lodge of wealthy, powerful guys exchanging whispered confidences.

By the same token, it is striking to what extent Ferrara – despite his carny-style boasting of "I know who really did it!" in a recent interview – explicitly avoids virtually every conspiracy theory surrounding Pasolini's death. He depicts an uncomfortable gay encounter between Pasolini and Pino Pelosi (Damiano Tamilia) and a gang of violent youths who descend on the pair, as well as Pino fatally driving a car over Pasolini's unconscious body (whether deliberately or not the film leaves an open question). But any possible wider connections, motivations or set-ups, long a matter of feverish speculation, are left largely unprobed. Intriguingly, among Ferrara's publicised initial intentions for the project was the inclusion, as part of this 'last day', of Pasolini's negotiations with thieves who had stolen some reels of *Salò's* negative – an incident that figures prominently, for instance, in Sergio Citti's ideas about his mentor's death.

This absence of overt political conspiracy will doubtless be a disappointment to some viewers of *Pasolini*. But politics resurfaces at another, more general level, closely tied to statements from Pasolini's final, re-enacted interview. In his vision of 'the situation' of the modern Western world in 1975, consumerist culture (and this is a critique with which Ferrara profoundly identifies) has created a pervasive atmosphere of violence; people's frustrated desires lead to a chain of "having, owning and destroying". *Pasolini*, in this sense, embodies the harsh wisdom of the artist's final journalistic articles: as he warns his self-satisfied interviewer, "Hell is rising, and it's coming at you" – or, as his suggested headline for the piece states even more pithily, "We are all in danger."

Credits and Synopsis

Produced by

Thierry Lounas
Conchita Airolodi
Joseph Rouschop

Screenplay

Maurizio Braucci
Based on an idea
by Abel Ferrara,

Nicola Tranquillino

Director of

Photography

Stefano Falivene

Editor

Fabio Nunziata

Production Designer

Igor Gabriel

Sound

Julien Momencau

Silvia Moraes

Thomas Gauder

Costume Designer

Rossano Marchi

©Capricci, Urania

Pictures, Tarantula,

Dublin Films, Arte

France Cinéma

Production

Companies

Capricci presents a

co-production with

Urania Pictures,

Tarantula, Dublin

Films and Arte

France Cinéma

Supported by

Eurimages

Recognized film of
cultural interest by
Ministero dei Beni e
delle Attività Culturali

e del Turismo

With the participation

of Canal+, Arte

France, Wallonia,

Wallimage, Agnès B.

and Funny Balloons

With the support of

Région Aquitaine and

Région des Pays de la

Loire in partnership

with CNC, Italian Tax

Credit Law December

24th 2007 N. 244,

Tax Shelter of Belgian

Federal Government,

Cinéfinance

Tax Shelter

In co-production

with Belgacom

Executive Producers

Camille Chandelier

Costanza Coldagelli

Film Extracts

Salò o le 120 giornate

di Sodoma/Salò

or the 120 Days of

Sodom (1975)

Cast

Willem Dáfoe

Pier Paolo Pasolini

Ninetto Davoli

Epifanio

Riccardo Scamarcio

Ninetto Davoli

Valerio Mastandrea

Nico Naldini

Roberto Zibetti

Carlo

Andrea Bosca

Andrea Fago

Giada Colagrande

Graziella

Damiano Tamilia

Pino Pelosi

Francesco Siciliano

Furio Colombo

Luca Lionello

narrator

Salvatore Ruocco

politician

Adriana Asti

Susanna Pasolini

Maria de Medeiros

Laura Betti

In Colour

[L&S:1]

Subtitles

Distributor

BFI Distribution

Rome, early November 1975. The celebrated writer-director Pier Paolo Pasolini flies home from Stockholm. He is deep in post-production on his film 'Salò', and is drafting his vast novel 'Petrolio'. We follow, approximately, the last 24 hours of his life.

He is woken in the morning by his mother Susanna, with whom he lives; he breakfasts while reading the newspapers, and consults with his assistant and cousin Graziella. Re-enacted scenes from 'Petrolio' are intermingled with his daily routine. He lunches at home with Susanna, Graziella, his friend Laura Betti and his cousin and collaborator Nico Naldini, discussing cultural issues. In the late afternoon, Pasolini gives an in-depth interview to Furio Colombo, a journalist at 'La Stampa'. Afterwards, he plays soccer with a group of boys. In the evening, Pasolini dines at a favourite restaurant while meeting with actor Ninetto Davoli (along with wife and baby) to discuss a new film project, 'Porno-Teo-Kolossal'. Several imagined scenes from this project are interwoven with what follows. Pasolini goes cruising and picks up a teenager, Pino Pelosi. They dine together and discuss Pino's daily life. Their sexual encounter on the beach at Ostia is cut short by a group of three young men who, along with Pino, beat Pasolini nearly to death. Escaping in Pasolini's car, Pino drives over Pasolini, finishing him off.

The next day, the corpse is discovered; Laura arrives at the Pasolini home to console a grieving Susanna. The final images show Pasolini's typewriter and the pages of his appointment diary.

Absolutely Anything

United Kingdom 2015
Director: Terry Jones
Certificate 12A 85m 31s

Reviewed by Trevor Johnston

Realising that he's suddenly been gifted with absolute power, Simon Pegg's struggling South London schoolteacher Neil instructs his pet dog to regurgitate, intact, the notes for the third chapter of his long-gestating novel. In another movie, the protagonist might have wished for a cure for cancer, the end of world hunger or maybe even the completion of a dead-cert bestseller, but not the bumbling Neil – who understands the extent of his gift when he sees his pet dog's poo gather itself up off the carpet, amble to the loo and dive in. If writer-director Terry Jones once made his own wish that this long-abandoned comic-fantasy script might at last make it into production, the decidedly dismal results should act as a warning that some old drafts are better left in the drawer – and indeed should remind producers that a combination of various Monty Python alumni and presumed latter-day box-office banker Pegg can't save material that's not up to the mark in the first place.

The central conceit in itself isn't unpromising, with a panel of galactic supreme beings (voiced to no great distinction by the remaining Pythons) giving Earth a chance to escape planned obliteration if one random individual demonstrates a capacity for good. Shades of the original *Hitchhiker's Guide to the Galaxy* and the Jim Carrey vehicle *Bruce Almighty* perhaps, but a notion with broad potential for comic invention, visual trickery and – as in the H.G. Wells story 'The Man Who Could Work Miracles', Jones's avowed inspiration – perhaps a cautionary, moral dimension too. If one were being kind, the fact that Neil's interventions prove so puerile and small-scale (getting the severe headmaster to like him, beating up his love interest's threatening ex-boyfriend) might be seen as a comment on modern man's self-involved myopia, yet the longer this farrago ploughs its narrow path, the more obvious it becomes that its priorities are short-term cheap



Dogged pursuit: Kate Beckinsale

humour, little of which raises much mirth.

Part of the problem is Pegg's characteristically bemused everyman, played with such lackadaisical casualness that the extremes of wonder implied by the story barely even register, while the ongoing flurry of largely ineffectual sight gags (British bobbies with pink uniforms) and one-liners (Neil asks if an attractive new penis might actually come in white as well) are a cumulative drag on a central romantic-triangle plot that's deeply uninvolved to begin with. Eventually, the script shows some gumption by tackling issues such as homelessness and hunger, but Neil's poor choice of wording proves his undoing, and it's left to his trusty canine sidekick to muster an exasperatingly convenient resolution out of thin air.

In a final low-key contribution, the amiable mutt is voiced by Robin Williams, seen in the recording booth in some end-credits video inserts. A sad closing bow for him, but somehow it's in keeping with the generally depressing air of this hugely forgettable coda to Terry Jones and the Python crew's long-secure comedic legacy.

Alive Inside

USA 2014
Director: Michael Rossato-Bennett

Reviewed by Hannah McGill

The point of this campaigning documentary is distilled in its opening moments, as a 90-year-old woman, having first said that she remembers little of her early life, becomes lucid and voluble about its detail on listening to a recording of Louis Armstrong performing 'When the Saints Go Marching In'. It's impossible not to be moved by the sense of long-repressed emotion and memory apparently instantaneously stirred to life; and it is this reaction that the ensuing film relies on for its not inconsiderable emotional impact.

That nursing-home residents locked within a variety of neurological disorders – predominantly Alzheimer's and other forms of dementia, but also multiple sclerosis and schizophrenia – are affected to a startling degree by hearing music from their younger lives seems inarguable on the evidence here; certainly the film presents no cases in which the approach achieves less than spectacular results. Yet the nursing-home system in the US (which the film exclusively features) is shown to be frustratingly resistant to the positive effects of music therapy, however earnestly it is demonstrated by the film's hero, social worker Dan Cohen. Cohen's work became newsworthy in the US when a piece of footage, included here, of 94-year-old Henry Dreher's response to hearing Cab Calloway went viral.

It is with extraordinary sequences of this type that director Michael Rossato-Bennett, who filmed the work over a period of years and who also provides the voiceover, is obviously most at ease, and understandably: from a violent patient suddenly calmed by The Shirelles' 'Will You Love Me Tomorrow?' to a bipolar schizophrenic who kicks away her walker and starts dancing to salsa music, these are devastatingly affecting little chronicles of the effects music can have even on psyches and memories that are otherwise severely compromised.

When it comes to contextualising this wonderful content, the film is less surefooted. The voiceover tends to repeat the same observations again and again, with varying degrees of hyperbole ('Music is magic... Music touches us all... Music awakens in us our most profound safety'), superfluously seeking to stir up feelings already amply summoned by the footage of the project at work; the scientific detail, meanwhile, is vaguely expressed ('Alzheimer's and other dementias don't affect the parts of the brain that store music,' is one snippet, from an underused Oliver Sacks). While the historical material regarding the establishment of nursing homes in the US is informative – in part because of the pithy and charismatic contribution made by the geriatric care specialist Dr Bill Thomas – the film doesn't really bring things up to date, remaining oddly distant from any specifics of current US politics concerning healthcare. (It also hints at but ultimately glosses over aspects of the donation drive, notably the fact that early entreaties to Apple to support the project by supplying iPods were refused; the company does, though, now provide a 7 per cent discount on devices donated through the project.)

The film's view of 'elders', meanwhile, has a troubling mawkishness to it: they are wise innocents all, their much vaunted uniqueness

Credits and Synopsis

Produced by
Bill Jones
Ben Timlett
Written by
Terry Jones
Gavin Scott
Director of Photography
Peter Hannan
Editor
Julian Rodd
Production Design
James Acheson
Music
George Fenton
Sound Designer
Andre Jacquemin
Costume Design
James Acheson
Conceptual Design and Illustration
Paul Catling

©Anything
Absolutely Ltd
Production Companies
Bill & Ben
Productions presents
in association with
GFM Films and
Premiere Picture

Produced by Bill & Ben Productions
Executive Producers
Mike Medavoy
Chris Chesser
Ben White
Mark Sandell
Edward Simons
Kent Walwin
Dean Goldberg
David Rogers
Jason Garrett
Jeremy Martell

Cast
Simon Pegg
Neil Clarke
Kate Beckinsale
Catherine
Sanjeev Bhaskar
Ray
Rob Riggie
Grant
Robert Bathurst
James Cleverill
Eddie Izzard
headmaster
Joanna Lumley
Fenella
Marianne Oldham
Rosie

Emma Pierson
Miss Pringle
Meera Syal
Fiona Blackwell
Mojo
Dennis the dog
John Cleese
voice of chief alien,
the Intergalactic
Council of Superior
Beings [ICSB]
Terry Gilliam
voice of nasty
alien, ICSB
Eric Idle
voice of Salubrious
Gat, ICSB
Terry Jones
voice of scientist
alien, ICSB
Michael Palin
voice of kindly
alien, ICSB
Robin Williams
voice of Dennis

In Colour
[2:35:1]

Distributor
Lionsgate UK

London, present day. Schoolteacher Neil Clarke, struggling to complete his first novel, dreams about Catherine, the attractive TV researcher who lives in the flat downstairs. Meanwhile in deep space the Council of Superior Beings assesses a demolition order for Earth, granting one resident limitless powers for a ten-day period; if that person shows capacity for good, the planet will be spared.

A blue light strikes an unaware Neil, whose casual remark about zapping Form 10C causes the death of the entire class in an explosion. Later, at home, Neil realises what's happened when he makes a whisky bottle refill itself. He uses his power to make the school gym teacher worship his science-master friend Ray. Unbeknown to Neil, a break in the interplanetary power supply causes his powers to wane temporarily. Catherine, plagued by the attentions of her American military ex-boyfriend Grant, drunkenly seduces Neil. An angry Grant kidnaps Neil and his pet mongrel Dennis (whose thoughts Neil can hear), and forces Neil to execute a list of frivolous demands. Catherine and Ray come to the rescue.

Neil is subsequently thwarted when he attempts to facilitate global good, and in frustration he passes his powers to Dennis, who decides to destroy the Superior Beings before they can demolish the planet. Returned to normal, Neil is reunited with Catherine.

American Ultra

USA/Switzerland 2015
Director: Nima Nourizadeh

Reviewed by Adam Nayman

The problem with Bill and Ted was never their lack of killer instinct. Back in the innocent days of 1989, all a Hollywood stoner comedy had to do to become a cult hit was to hurtle a couple of hapless hosers through history and let their slack-jawed responses do the rest. As recently as the mid-2000s, the formula was tweaked only slightly to encompass a voyage to White Castle or the retrieval of some dude's misplaced car. But with *American Ultra*, this most benevolent of American subgenres is kitted out with an arsenal of action-movie moves. This story of a likeable burnout subconsciously programmed as a killing machine and activated to create untold R-rated havoc is so self-allegorical as to render the act of reviewing it redundant.

The best joke in the movie is its first. We're informed that the action is taking place in 'Liman', West Virginia, a tip of the cap to the director of *The Bourne Identity* (calling the town 'Ludlum' would have been too obvious). And while the backwater ambience is probably laid on a little thick by director Nima Nourizadeh – getting his shot at a big-ticket production after his thrifty and unruly 2012 found-footage comedy *Project X* – the attention to visual detail is admirable. A fleeting close-up of the price tag attached to the tacky Hawaiian shirt being stowed away by Mike Howell (Jesse Eisenberg) after his abortive attempt at a romantic getaway with his girlfriend Phoebe (Kristen Stewart) condenses exposition and emotion into the space of a single insert.

In *Adventureland* (2009), Eisenberg and Stewart essayed one of the most credible adolescent courtships in recent mainstream American cinema; here, they've been cast against type as mush-heads, which is funny for a little but grows wearisome around about the same time that the plot really kicks into gear. The idea that Mike's THC-addled ineptitude masks a razor-



Joint enterprise: Jesse Eisenberg

sharp secret-agent skill set is meant as a comic variation on Matt Damon's Everyman identity crisis in the first Bourne film, except that Max Landis's script doesn't really point towards anything substantial. This slacker Manchurian candidate could have been suggestive of socially conditioned and sublimated male aggression (*à la* Landis's earlier and excellent *Chronicle*), or else overtly satirical like *Pineapple Express* (2008), but instead it's just functional – a pretence for extreme, stylised violence.

And yet, for all its calculated outrageousness – gory death by frying pan and enough F-words to choke Judd Apatow – *American Ultra* is a conventional, conservative movie. In the name of hitting its genre marks, it reduces Eisenberg to a standard hero and Stewart to a damsel in distress (albeit an uncommonly bloody and bruised one), and the showy, CGI-assisted camera movements in the fight sequences only enhance the sense of general weightlessness. The garishly animated end credits confirm Nourizadeh's ambitions as a gratuitous cartoonist, but for most of its running time, *American Ultra* is the wrong kind of two-dimensional – less an excellent adventure than a bogus journey. Ⓢ



Music man: *Alive Inside*

telegraphed via patchworks of generically cutesy archive footage and animated personal photographs. Effectively, however, the film is an extended funding appeal for Dan Cohen's charitable foundation, Music and Memory, and in that regard it works very well indeed, emphasising powerfully just how much difference a donated iPod or an effort to communicate can make in a person's life. Ⓢ

Credits and Synopsis

Produced by
Michael Rossato-Bennett
Alexandra McDougald
Regina K. Scully
Written by
Michael Rossato-Bennett
Director of Photography
Shachar Langlev
Editors
Michael Rossato-Bennett
Mark Demolar
Manuel Tsingaris
David Zieff
Original Score
Itaai Shur
Principal Sound

Mixing/Design
Eli Cohn
©Alive Inside LLC
Production Companies
Projector Media,
Shelley & Donald
Rubin Foundation
and Artemis Rising
Foundation in
association with
Impact Partners
and City Drive Films
present a Michael
Rossato-Bennett film
Executive producer:
The Shelley & Donald
Rubin Foundation
Executive Producers

Regina K. Scully
Geraldyn Dreyfous
Dan Cogan
Eric J. Bertrand
Limore Shur
Ben Spivak
Daniel E. Catullo III
Diana Barrett
Andrew Herwitz
Andrea Van Beuren
Forest King
Clark Langon

In Colour
[1.78:1]
Part-subtitled

Distributor
Picturehouse
Entertainment

A documentary following the work of New York City social worker and community organiser Dan Cohen, who attains striking results by playing the music of their pasts to dementia patients in nursing homes. Director Michael Rossato-Bennett films Cohen at work, initially at the Cobble Hill Health Center in Brooklyn, and documents his efforts to extend his project across the US. Commentators including neurologist Oliver Sacks, geriatric care specialist Bill Thomas and musician Bobby McFerrin affirm the innate human sensitivity to music and rhythm, and its capacity to reach the otherwise unresponsive. However, the bureaucracy of the US nursing home system proves difficult to penetrate, and some of its personnel are surprisingly resistant to the idea of reaching their patients via music. Rossato-Bennett posts footage of Cohen's work with 94-year-old Henry Dreher online; it goes viral, and Cohen's work makes it on to the national news agenda. The number of nursing homes signing up to be part of the project increases.

Credits and Synopsis

Produced by
Anthony Bregman
Kevin Frakes
Raj Brinder Singh
David Alpert
Britton Rizzio
Written by
Max Landis
Director of Photography
Michael Bonvillian
Editor
Bill Pankow
Andrew Marcus
Production Designer
Richard Bridgland
Original Music
Marcello Zarvos
Sound Mixer
Erik H. Magnus
Costume Designer
David C. Robinson

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Production Companies
Lionsgate, PalmStar
Media Capital and
Kevin Frakes present
in association
with FilmNation
Entertainment a
Likely Story, PalmStar
Entertainment,

Circle of Confusion
production in
association with
Merced Media
Partners, Tadmor
Entertainment,
The Bridge Finance
Company AG
A Nima Nourizadeh
film
Executive Producers
Buddy Patrick
Robert Ogden
Barnum
Jonathan Gardner
Ray Angelic
Stuart Brown
Tom Rock
Gideon Tadmor
Eyal Rimmon
Steffen Aumueller
Zülfi Kar Güzelgün

Cast
Jesse Eisenberg
Mike Howell
Kristen Stewart
Phoebe Larson
Tophir Grace
Adrian Yates
Connie Britton
Victoria Lasseter
Walton Goggins
Laughter

John Leguizamo
Rose
Bill Pullman
Krueger
Tony Hale
Petey Douglas

Dolby Digital
In Colour
[2.35:1]

Distributor
Entertainment Film
Distributors Ltd

Liman, West Virginia, the present. Perpetually stoned convenience-store clerk Mike Howell plans to take his girlfriend Phoebe to Hawaii to propose, but he has a panic attack at the airport and they return home. Mike doesn't know that he is part of the secret Ultra programme, a training exercise run by the CIA. Soon afterwards, the CIA agent who recruited him, Victoria Lasseter, learns that Mike has been slated for termination by her boss Adrian Yates, who wants to dismantle the Ultra programme in favour of his own initiative. Lasseter flies to Liman and activates Mike with a code word. Mike then kills two of the assassins dispatched to take him out; in a panic, he calls Phoebe, who tells him that they need to get out of town. Yates arrives on the scene with a team of killers, who trail Mike and Phoebe to the local police station, where there is a shootout; the pair escape and hide out with Mike's friend Rose, who locks them in the basement. Mike is gassed and Phoebe saves his life, inadvertently revealing that she's really his handler, and that she lied about how they met; Mike is heartbroken, but when Phoebe is abducted by Yates's men, he resolves to rescue her. With Lasseter's help, Mike survives an attack on his house and leads a one-man strike on the supermarket where Yates is holding Phoebe. Lasseter chokes Yates; Mike kills everybody else and reunites with Phoebe. He proposes to her before being tasered by police. Yates is secretly executed and Lasseter sends Mike and Phoebe into the field as special agents.

The Bad Education Movie

Director: Elliot Hegarty
Certificate 15 90m 37s

Reviewed by Henry K. Miller

The mini-resurgence of the sitcom movie after three decades of dormancy deserves fuller investigation. Why the genre – which flourished, if that's the right word, between *Till Death Us Do Part* (1969) and *George and Mildred* (1980) – disappeared at the time of the first Thatcher government, and why it returned, with *The Inbetweeners Movie* (2011), at the advent of the Cameron coalition, are questions for another day. However it came about, *The Bad Education Movie*, co-written by its star Jack Whitehall, who also devised the television series, is a state-of-the-nation film, a response to the nationalist upsurge that has transformed British politics in the year since the Scottish independence referendum, and to the growing estrangement between the multicultural London conurbation and much of the rest of the country.

Whitehall plays Alfie Wickers, a posh teacher in a Watford comprehensive whose pupils are his only real friends. As in the 1970s sitcom spin-offs *Holiday on the Buses* (1973) and *Are You Being Served?* (1977), and as in both *Inbetweeners* films, *The Bad Education Movie* takes the regular cast on holiday, in this instance to Cornwall, where they find themselves in over their heads with the Cornish Liberation Army, led by salty-seadog type Pasco (Iain Glen). The well-structured plot involves Alfie unwittingly delivering a CLA bomb to the home of one of his old public-school chums, the odious Atticus Hoyer (Jeremy Irvine), son of the local Conservative MP, whom the CLA blames for the area's colonisation by rich second-homers.

As in the excellent TV series *Fresh Meat*, Whitehall's character, while epitomising the red-trousered twit of popular demonology, means well, and makes common cause with his socially inferior pupils after learning the true nature of the *real* toffs, who are like something out of *The Riot Club*. The result is a sort of One Nation comedy that can't resolve but only fudge all the tensions it plays on, making Alfie a Tory paternalist who can see that the Cornish secessionists have legitimate concerns but deplores their narrowness and



Class warfare: Jack Whitehall

zealotry. (Pasco boasts that the cause attracts all sorts – “young, old, men, women, white...”) At the film's climax, Alfie makes an impassioned but incoherent speech that mashes up *Braveheart*, 300 and Cheryl Cole to make and obscure his point.

Unlike its family-orientated 1970s forebears, *Bad Education*, which was originally broadcast on BBC3, is intended for adolescents and young adults, and many of the jokes are extremely puerile. Aping the extraordinarily successful *Inbetweeners Movie*, the film was released to coincide with, and in fact concludes with, GCSE results day. Recapitulating the film's theme, however, it tries to bind this niche audience with a wider one. In the opening scene, which sets out to be as edgily offensive as possible, one of the children asks whether Anne Frank “was like Bridget Jones”, as if the latter were a more obvious reference point for someone born around 1999. But then, in another joke, someone refers to *Takeshi's Castle*, and one of the other characters replies, “Ohhh, great reference” – and I laughed without getting it. 📺

Credits and Synopsis

Produced by Ben Cavey Pippa Brown	Pete Rowe Edited by Peter H. Oliver	Costume Designer Claire Finlay-Thompson
Screenplay Jack Whitehall Freddy Syborn	Production Designer Simon Rogers	
Created by Jack Whitehall Ben Cavey	Original Music Composed by Vince Pope	Production Companies Entertainment Film Distributors present a Cave Bear Productions and Tiger Aspect
Director of Photography	Production Sound Mixer Nigel Albermarliche	

Pictures production
Executive Producers
Nigel Green
Trevor Green
Bella Wright
Helen Wright

Cast
Jack Whitehall
Alfie Wickers

Harry Enfield
Martin Wickers
Mathew Horne
Fraser
Sarah Solemani
Rosie Gulliver
Joanna Scanlan
Susan Poulter
Clarke Peters
Commander Andrews
Jeremy Irvine

Atticus Hoyer
Iain Glen
Pasco

In Colour
[1.85:1]

Distributor
Entertainment Film
Distributors Ltd

Watford, present day. Posh history teacher Alfie Wickers takes his class of teenagers, whom he treats as his equals, on a school trip to Cornwall. Their plan to turn the trip into a holiday is scuppered when Susan, the overprotective mother of one of the students, Joe, decides to accompany them. On their first night in Cornwall, Alfie and his wards sneak out of their B&B and into a local pub patronised by the Cornish Liberation Army. Through a mix-up, the CLA members mistake Alfie for one of their own, and manipulate him into delivering a package of what he thinks is marijuana to his friend Atticus, son of a Conservative MP, who is throwing a party the next night. In return,

the CLA abducts Susan and deposits her in France.

Atticus and his friends are beastly to Alfie at the party, which ends when the package turns out to be a bomb. Alfie and his class are taken hostage by CLA leader Pasco and held in a castle where the CLA has launched an uprising. While incarcerated, Alfie and the children acknowledge their mutual affection and gratitude. The police, Alfie's colleagues and the children's mothers, led by Susan, close in on the location and the children are able to escape while Alfie distracts the mob. He later fights Pasco and manages to escape himself.

Back in Watford, Alfie's students receive their GCSE results; Joe gets an A in history.

Brothers

India 2015
Director: Karan Malhotra
Certificate 15 155m 40s

Reviewed by Naman Ramachandran

Bollywood loves its estranged brothers, the most famous examples being the sibling protagonists of *Deewar* (1975). It is no surprise, then, that Gavin O'Connor's 2011 sports drama *Warrior*, in which two estranged brothers face off in a mixed martial arts tournament, gets a Bollywood remake as *Brothers*.

Comparisons with O'Connor's excellent film must sadly end there, however, because in the hands of director Karan Malhotra it is transformed into a loud, distended melodrama that adds superfluous backstories and is drenched in Christian imagery for no apparent reason. Malhotra is no stranger to unnecessary remakes, having debuted with *Agneepath* (2012), a shrill take on the 1990 classic of the same name.

In *Brothers*, whenever Malhotra wants to emphasise a point he belabours it, to the extent that dialogue in one scene is often repeated as voiceover in the very next. The climactic tournament has its rousing moments but these are buried in the endless build-ups given to each fight, with the asinine banter between a pair of ringside commentators adding to the misery. But critical opprobrium matters not a whit to Bollywood audiences, and *Brothers* has scored a career-best opening for both Akshay Kumar and Sidharth Malhotra, who play the brothers. 📺

Credits and Synopsis

Produced by Karan Johar Hiroo Yash Johar	Dileep Subramaniam Costume Designer Mandira Shukla	Shafali Shah Maria Fernandes Ashutosh Rana Umesh
Screenplay Ekta Pathak Malhotra	Action Co-ordinators Justin Yu Eric Brown	Kiran Kumar Peter Braganza Ashok Lokhande Monty's mentor
Based on the film <i>Warrior</i> [2011]	Production Companies Fox Star Studios presents in association with Dharma Productions, Lionsgate and Endemol India	In Colour [2.35:1] Subtitles
Screenplay by Gavin O'Connor, Anthony Tambakis, Cliff Dorfman, Story by Gavin O'Connor, Cliff Dorfman	Produced by Endemol India	Distributor 20th Century Fox International (UK)
Dialogue Siddharth-Garima	Executive Producer Parth Dholakia	
Director of Photography Hemant Chaturvedi		
Editor Akiv Ali		
Production Designer Suresh Selvarajan		
Music Ajay-Atul [i.e. Ajay Gogavale, Atul Gogavale]		
Lyrics Amitabh Bhattacharya		
Sound Design		

Cast
Akshay Kumar
David Fernandes
Sidharth Malhotra
Monty Fernandes
Jackie Schroff
Garson Fernandes
Jacqueline Fernandez
Jenny Fernandes

Mumbai, the present. Streetfighting has been legalised in India, and sports impresario Peter Braganza announces the country's first mixed martial arts tournament, *Right to Fight* (R2F). Former streetfighter Garson Fernandes is released from prison, having served a sentence for killing his wife in a drunken rage. He trains his younger son Monty to fight, and gets him into R2F. Monty's estranged brother David also used to be a streetfighter but now works as a physics teacher, though he takes on the occasional fight to pay for his daughter's kidney treatment. David's school disapproves of his fighting and sacks him, so he too enters R2F. The brothers progress through to the finals in contrasting styles. David wins and the family is reunited.

Containment

United Kingdom 2015
Director: Neil Mcenery-West
Certificate 15 76m 35s

Reviewed by Violet Lucca

If you were marooned with a group of people, what objects would you choose to bring with you in order to survive, and how would you use them? It's something that everyone has probably chewed over at least once in their life – it's long been the stuff of job interviews and genre fiction. But what makes it a compelling question isn't just how creatively someone can respond, but also how totally wrong-headed and/or self-righteous they can be in their answer.

Neil Mcenery-West's directorial debut doesn't necessarily tread new ground with the idea that, in such high-pressure group situations, base human nature becomes the real enemy and chaos ensues. However, he uses a framework that keeps things fresh enough for *Containment's* lean 77-minute running time: a group of neighbours on a council estate (who previously went out of their way to avoid each other) must work together to figure out why they've been sealed inside their respective flats with industrial-strength epoxy.

These urban castaways are a (racially homogeneous) cross-section of society: Mark, a recently divorced middle-aged father and sculptor; pensioner and probable avid *Daily Express* reader Enid; Sally and Aiden, a professional young couple who are gentrifying the building; Sergei, a second-generation Brit with a short fuse; and Sergei's mute, passive younger brother Nicu. Mcenery-West manages to avoid reducing these characters to stereotypes but doesn't go too far in the other direction and unnecessarily complicate them. (Enid can't stop grousing about how much better things were during the war, but she occasionally draws on that experience in productive or meaningful ways, putting aside her unapologetic xenophobia and cigs to be kind to Nicu.)

Aside from its overarching premise, the film largely avoids anything too heavy-handedly moralising, instead quietly commenting on the barriers of modern life. This is a world where you don't knock on your neighbour's door unless their television is on too loud. Unable to exit through their doors or windows individually, the protagonists join up by smashing through each others' walls, moving laterally rather than straight ahead; problems arise when they revert to their self-centred ways.

Narrative information is doled out piecemeal



Flat out of hell: Andrew Leung

and is entirely restricted to what we see happening in the estate's courtyard and through the windows of the block opposite, or in the patronising pre-recorded messages that come through the intercom ("Please remain calm, the situation is under control") and gradually become more sinister ("Stay inside and await further instructions. Failure to do so will carry serious consequences"). Although these clues never form a complete whole, even at the end, the group slowly come to realise that, because of an outbreak of a fast-acting virus, the government has quietly quarantined the estate to avoid widespread panic. When Sergei captures one of the hazmat team we've seen outside, proudly displaying her in a window with a sign around her neck that says "WE'VE GOT ONE", the group experience a small-scale version of that panic, with fatal consequences: a roving band of armed tenants pay a visit and demand they be given a vaccine, 'accidentally' disposing of those who stand in their way.

Again, pretty standard stuff. But the real power of *Containment* lies in Mcenery-West's direction, which demonstrates a visual wisdom that's truly rare in a first-time director. With a shoestring budget, he's created a taut yet understated environment for the mystery that's refusing to unfold, eschewing clichés such as shaky-cam or rapid-fire cutting for long takes and well-placed, well-crafted sound. It's exciting to think what he could do with a little more cash and a lot more space. Ⓜ

The Dance of Reality

Chile/France 2013
Director: Alejandro Jodorowsky
Certificate 18 132m 43s

Reviewed by Adrian Martin

Although there is no shortage of either surrealism or black humour in *The Dance of Reality*, those cultish fans of Alejandro Jodorowsky who swear by *El topo* (1970) or *Santa sangre* (1989) may be a little puzzled by the director's first film in 23 years. Despite the presence of a gang of disabled ex-workers, queer circus clowns, murder (human and animal) and a golden-shower sex scene, this is a relatively quiet, calm and reflective work for Jodorowsky – inaugurating on screen a series of autobiographical reflections that he has already continued in a sequel currently awaiting completion, *Endless Poetry*.

For those who have faithfully followed Jodorowsky's multifaceted career, however, this filmed version of *The Dance of Reality* – covering only the childhood section of his 2001 literary autobiography of the same name – will serve both as catch-up and continuation. Since the 1990s, Jodorowsky has become a celebrated 'psychomagician', exploring a method of shamanistic therapy that brings together many formative experiences in his life (hence the presence in the film of a wise theosophist, played by Jodorowsky's son, psychoshamanist Cristóbal).

Psychomagic – which encourages and facilitates the transformation of the self, and of reality itself through the power of imagination – goes hand in hand, in Jodorowsky's system, with psychogenealogy: the slow drawing of a family tree which, if explored sensitively, will pinpoint the neuroses and blocks that have been handed down through a family's generations to the uncomprehending individual. Liberation from such problems demands (in a further loop back to Jodorowsky's origins as a performance artist in Santiago and Paris) an often extreme, symbolic 'acting out' in the form of a theatrical, ritual gesture.

The film of *The Dance of Reality* offers, for all intents and purposes, Jodorowsky's personal, therapeutic, psychogenealogical ritual; he calls it "a kind of family healing". By casting his son Brontis as his father Jaime (alongside many other family members in smaller roles), Jodorowsky sets the stage for a controlled, restorative, often very humorous psychodrama. "Everything is true, or almost," says the writer-director; and everything hinges on that "almost". Starting from the real facts and situations of his early life, Jodorowsky gives himself licence to materialise the inner dreams of his characters – not as discrete fantasy sequences, but as core elements of the plot and *mise en scène*.

So Jaime – in an elaborate narrative intrigue airlifted from Jodorowsky's 1999 novel *El niño del jueves negro* (*Black Thursday's Child*) and taking up much of the film's second half – heroically sails away from home on a mission to kill the horrendous President Ibáñez (Bastían Bodenhöfer); meanwhile Alejandro's mother Sara (Pamela Flores), a frustrated opera singer, has all her lines of dialogue lines set to an orchestral score. The young Alejandro (Jeremias Herskovits) is also occasionally accompanied – in what are undoubtedly the film's most moving and lyrical moments – by Jodorowsky as he is today, a remarkably vital guy in his mid-eighties, putting the dark fears of childhood into verse, or imploring the

Credits and Synopsis

Produced by
Christine Hartland
Casey Herbert
Pete Smyth
Written by
David Lemon
Story
David Lemon
Neil Mcenery-West
Director of Photography
Arthur Mulhern
Editor
Arttu Salmi
Production Designer
Eléonore Cremonese
Composer
Graham Hadfield
Sound Designer
Nikola Medic

Costume Designer
Julie Elgar
@Containment Film Ltd
Production Companies
Patchwork
Productions and Bright Cold Day
Films in association with Bandoala Productions present
Executive Producer
Simon Sole

Cast
Lee Ross
Mark

Sheila Reid
Enid
Gabriel Senior
Nicu
Andrew Leung
Sergei
Louise Brealey
Sally
William Postlethwaite
Aiden
Pippa Nixon
Hazel

In Colour
[2.35:1]

Distributor
Independent Distribution

A council estate in England, the present. Mark wakes up late and discovers that there's been a power cut and that the door to his flat has been sealed shut. His neighbours Sally, Aiden, Sergei and Nicu break through his wall and explain that they've also been sealed inside, unable to access the corridor. In the courtyard outside they see people in hazmat gear taking estate residents into a field hospital. One of the residents tries to run but is shot by a sniper. Sergei captures one of the hazmat team, who explains that she and her colleagues are trying to contain a fast-acting airborne virus. Other residents begin to attack the group in the hope of getting a vaccine from the woman; Sally, Aiden and Sergei die in the process. As Nicu and Mark make their way from the estate, Mark is stabbed by a resident and dies. Nicu is tranquillised and taken to a holding cell with other children.



Soldier of fortune: Jeremias Herskovits

boy not to hurl himself off a cliff. Other striking scenes – such as when Sara strips off and paints both herself and her son pitch black in order to overcome night terror – are materialised in a fuzzy space somewhere between recollection and wish-fulfilment.

Psychomagic and psychogenealogy come together in the moment when Sara ultimately confronts Jaime with his love/hate ambivalence for authoritarian figures, via three large photo-portraits – of Stalin, Ibáñez and himself. Only by shooting the gun at ‘himself’ as well as his idols, and melodramatically setting his past attachments aflame, can he be freed. In the next instalment of this filmic autobiography, Alejandro too will need to leave home in order to begin the long, transformative journey back to his origins. It is a pity that, in one key respect, Jodorowsky’s work replays the conventionality of a given, mythic template: it’s the guys who get to embark on odysseys and find themselves, while mama stays at home and sings her big heart out.

In *The Dance of Reality*, Jodorowsky reaches beyond the purely personal or familial to big,

universal themes: the constant seesaw between “suffering and relief” in life (given many vivid, small-scale, parable-like illustrations); the deluded nature of all fanatical, political ideologies, whether of the left or right. The notes of satire, on this latter theme, are sometimes sounded in an overly facile and repetitive manner – Jodorowsky shows, at times, a tendency to reprise his best ideas beyond their endurance limit. Intriguingly, his customised form of magical realism here comes to resemble, more than anything else, the recent work of Terrence Malick.

Stylistically, the film has a touchingly simple, sometimes amateurish manner, akin to the genre of naive painting – a trait indelibly caught in the charming, B-movie-style digital effects of buildings (and people) on fire. While Jodorowsky’s earlier films revelled in their untrained, *art brut* approach, this one sets out less to shock or provoke than to evoke the purity and innocence of childhood emotions: shame, loneliness, fear, wonder, the cry for love and human connection. “Something is dreaming us,” counsels today’s Alejandro to his former self. “Embrace the illusion. Live!”

Credits and Synopsis

Produced by
Michel Seydoux
Moises Cosío
Alejandro Jodorowsky
Written by
Alejandro Jodorowsky
Director of Photography
Jean-Marie Dreujou
Editor in Chief
Maryline Monthieux
Production Designer
Alejandro Jodorowsky

Original Music
Adan Jodorowsky
Sound Mixer
Jean-Paul Hurier
Costume Designer
Pascale Montandon-Jodorowsky

©Le Soleil Films,
Caméra One
Production Company
Michel Seydoux

presents a film by
Alejandro Jodorowsky
Executive Producer
Xavier Guerrero
Yamamoto

Cast
Brontis Jodorowsky
Jaime
Pamela Flores
Sara
Jeremias Herskovits

Alejandro as a child
Alejandro Jodorowsky
Alejandro as an older man
Bastían Bodenhofer
President Carlos Ibáñez
Andres Cox
Don Aquiles
Adan Jodorowsky
anarchist
Cristóbal

Jodorowsky
theosophist
Dolby Digital
In Colour
[1.85:1]
Subtitles

Distributor
Metrodome
Distribution Ltd

Chilean theatrical title
La danza de la realidad

Chile, the 1930s. In the wake of the Wall Street Crash, much of the country has been scarred by poverty and unemployment. Alejandro lives in the town of Tocopilla with his father Jaime and mother Sara. The town is characterised by its closed businesses, crippled workers, a circus and fire brigade. Alejandro is mocked and humiliated by the other children for his Jewishness. Jaime, a stern authoritarian, reveres Stalin and forces Alejandro to follow a code of stoic manhood;

Sara dreams of being an opera star and never stops singing. As part of a radical collective, Jaime decides that he must travel to Santiago and kill President Ibáñez. On the first try, he gives his gun to a comrade, who fails; on the second attempt, his hands become permanently paralysed. Returning to Tocopilla after an amnesiac period in another village and becoming an inadvertent hero for resisting torture, Jaime begs forgiveness and reunites with his wife and son.

Death of a Gentleman

United Kingdom 2015

Directors: Sam Collins, Jarrod Kimber, Johnny Blank
Certificate 12A 98m 46s

Reviewed by Naman Ramachandran

There have been a number of documentaries about cricket in recent years, the tone always celebratory. Stevan Riley’s *Fire in Babylon* (2010) charted the rise of the West Indies cricket team as they swept all before them from the 1970s to the 1990s, with the only blip being a loss to India in the 1983 World Cup final. Tim Albone, Lucy Martens and Leslie Knott’s *Out of the Ashes* (2010) traced the remarkable rise of the Afghan cricket team, who overcame war and poverty to win a place in the 2010 World Twenty20 tournament. And James Erskine’s *From the Ashes* (2011) followed the remarkable 1981 Ashes series in which England came from behind to beat Australia, largely due to the heroics of Ian Botham.

Death of a Gentleman is anything but celebratory, however. It begins on a wistful note as journalists Sam Collins and Jarrod Kimber travel the world to explore the future of Test cricket and the impact on it of Twenty20. Test cricket is the 138-year-old dowager of the sport, lasting five days a game, while T20 is the brash 12-year-old format that condenses the action into three hours.

For a while, Collins and Kimber follow Australian cricketer Ed Cowan as he makes his Test debut for his country, witnessing his joy and his father’s pride as he plays at the ultimate level of ‘the gentleman’s game’. The tone of the film changes dramatically, though, when the journalists discover that cricket is run like an oligarchy, with the top three nations – India, England and Australia – calling the shots and rewarding themselves with more than 50 per cent of global revenues. The interviewees are largely unapologetic about it – former India captain Ravi Shastri says, “If India is powerful at the moment, so be it. The others have to



Pitch imperfect: Sam Collins

En équilibre

France 2014
Director: Denis Dercourt
Certificate PG 87m 23s

Reviewed by Sue Harris

On the surface, this seems a routine triumph-in-the-face-of-adversity narrative about an equestrian sportsman fighting his way back to fitness and happiness against the odds. Albert Dupontel is a subdued and broken Marc Guermont, a man whose life, career and relationship with his beloved horse Othello are abruptly shattered when a movie stunt goes wrong. The story is loosely inspired by the autobiography of real-life stunt horseman Bernard Sachsé, whose film work in France included *Les Visiteurs*, *The Horseman on the Roof* and *La Reine Margot*. Following an on-set accident in Geneva in 1994, Sachsé was paralysed and told he would spend the rest of his life in a wheelchair. Determined to ride again, he was back on horseback after only nine months, and went on to win a bronze medal at the 1996 Paralympics in Atlanta. Nicknamed 'The Centaur', Sachsé acted as technical adviser on the film, training Dupontel over some five months to do the incredible stunt riding with which the film opens. Far from routine, then, it is in fact a quite exceptional story of tenacity, second chances and balance restored to damaged lives.

For all its source veracity, however, the story arc is such that the film can rarely escape cliché, and the various stages of Marc's physical rehabilitation and fight for justice – the bullying corporate insurance company is cartoonlike in its attempts to kick the man when he's down – are all too predictable. The film tries to temper this through pacing, regularly contrasting Guermont's earthbound paralysis with moments of soaring dynamism as he remembers being at the wheel of speeding cars or boats, or sitting tall on Othello's back in the training yard; in particular, the flashbacks to Marc riding on the beach, seemingly flying across the sands on Othello, powerfully convey a sense of the freedom and independence he has lost but still desperately craves.

Although there is a tired quality to the way an unlikely love story takes centre stage, it is at the level of drama that the film has the most to offer, the two leads performing their parts with



Year of the horse: Cécile de France

compelling maturity. Guermont's anguish is achingly expressed in Dupontel's measured silences and set jaw, and by the sheer physical effort we see the actor make when forcing his leaden legs to mount Othello. When Cécile de France's insurance agent Florence arrives on the scene to talk about financial compensation, her very body seems to rub salt into Marc's wounds: she is tall, lithe and graceful as she moves around his home, overseeing the renovations necessary for him to live as a disabled man, while he watches, immobile in his wheelchair.

Both actors are masters of stillness, communicating through looks more than dialogue, and the image of their faces in a state of quiet reflection is somehow what stays in the mind over and above the film's events. They bring a quality of intimacy and shared instinct to their relationship, even when featured separately, juxtaposed in their different lives. They are both creatures driven by their passions, and the harmony they ultimately find – seen in the film's lazy 'one year later' coda – lies not in a future relationship with the other, but rather in their respective relationship with themselves: with horses, with music and, as life moves on, with their place in the world. Ⓢ

Credits and Synopsis

A film by Sam Collins Jarrod Kimber Johnny Blank	Jacqueline Bender Rhys Adams Ayush Ahuja	In Colour and Black & White [L78:]
Producer Sam Collins	©Death of a Gentleman Limited	Distributor Dartmouth Films
Written by Sam Collins Jarrod Kimber Jon Hotten	Production Companies A Two Chucks, Death of a Gentleman Limited production in association with Wellington Films	
Director of Photography Anthony Koreny	A film by Sam Collins, Jarrod Kimber, Johnny Blank	
Editors David Fairhead Graham Taylor Mike Rolt	Executive Producers Christopher Hird Kami Naghdi	
Original Score Chris Roe		
Sound Francis Kelly		

London, 2011. Sam Collins and Jarrod Kimber set off on a journey around the world to explore the future of Test cricket, a five-day game that has been losing ground to the shorter, more financially viable Twenty20 format. In Australia they meet cricketer Ed Cowan, who realises his dream of playing for the national team. Their travels then take them to India, Sri Lanka, the United Arab Emirates and back to the UK. En route they discover that the future of the game is threatened by the way it is administered, with the big three cricketing countries – India, England and Australia – grabbing the largest chunk of the billion-dollar revenues for themselves, leaving very little for the smaller national teams. They explore an alleged conflict of interest concerning N. Srinivasan, the Indian cricket administrator with fingers in many pies, but he stonewalls them. Giles Clarke, chairman of the English and Wales Cricket Board at the time, dismisses the idea of cricket at the Olympics since it clashes with the English season.

By 2014, the big three have appointed themselves rulers of the game; Ed Cowan no longer plays for Australia; and former greats of the game express hope for a future for Test cricket.

Credits and Synopsis

Produced by Isabelle Grellat Doublet Éric Altmayer Nicolas Altmayer	Editing Pauline Gaillard Art Director Brigitte Brassart Costumes Catherine Boisgontier Original Music Composed, Orchestrated and Conducted by/Piano Jérôme Lemonnier Sound François Maurel François Fayard Olivier Dô Hùu Co-ordinator Patrice Cossoneau	©Mandarin Cinéma, Studiocanal, Cinéfrance 1888, France 3 Cinéma Production Companies Mandarin Cinéma and Studiocanal present a Mandarin Cinéma, Studiocanal, Cinéfrance 1888, France 3 Cinéma co-production With the participation of Canal+ Ciné+ and France Télévisions And the support of la Région des Pays de la	Loire in partnership with the CNC and the support of la Région Bretagne	Philippe Duclos owner Bruno Monsaingeon piano teacher Laure Calamy Séverine Marianne Groves Marie Joseph Malerba Victor Alexis Loret Séverine's husband Vincent Furic Nicolas Louise Mugler Manon Evan Schmidt Grégoire	Marie Bäumer Alexandra In Colour [L85:] Subtitles Distributor Studiocanal Limited
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France, the present. Marc Guermont, stuntman and horse trainer, is left paraplegic after a startled horse stamps on his back on a film set. His insurance case is handled by Florence Kernel, whose task is to persuade him to settle for the minimum amount of compensation. As Florence gets to know Marc, she becomes increasingly uncomfortable with her company's mercenary and intimidatory procedures. She advises Marc to seek legal advice and provides his lawyer

with evidence to challenge the company – an act that results in her losing her job. Their relationship turns briefly to love, as Marc inspires Florence to rethink her own priorities in life. She decides to retrain as a pianist and follow the career path she abandoned as a girl.

A year later, Florence is happily working in a library and playing at musical auditions. Marc has become a champion para-athlete, competing for France on his horse Othello in international dressage events.

Escobar: Paradise Lost

France/Spain/Belgium 2014
Director: Andrea Di Stefano
Certificate 15 119m 48s

Reviewed by Demetrios Matheou

The questions posed by the life of notorious Colombian drug lord Pablo Escobar offer terrific material. What motivates a farmer's son to become a drug trafficker and murderer? How did he manage the sheer scale of an operation that shipped industrial amounts of cocaine to North America? How did he weave such a spell over his compatriots that half of them continued to regard him as a Robin Hood hero even after he was exposed as a criminal who had torn their country apart? Every tidbit of Escobar's life and times makes one drool over the possibilities. Unfortunately, actor-turned-director Andrea Di Stefano sidetracks all of it, instead offering a nightmare version of *Meet the Parents*.

Despite the title, and a typically nuanced and intense turn by Benicio Del Toro as Escobar, this isn't really about the crime kingpin anyway; rather, it's about the naïf who stumbles into his world and suffers the consequences. The result is a thriller without psychological insight or social context, gripping enough, but nonetheless feeling like a wasted opportunity.

Di Stefano starts at the beginning of the end, in 1991, with Escobar's exposure as a crook. Among those present at a briefing of his most trusted lieutenants is terrified young Canadian Nick (Josh Hutcherson) – and we wonder how this little gringo has been allowed into the lion's den. It's a good tactic by the director, not only teasing us with Nick's incongruous presence but also allowing Del Toro to suggest a crook's honour in his character's makeup as he soothes 'Nico's' nerves – but any hint of decency will soon be powerfully contradicted.

Then the story rewinds, to Nick's arrival in Colombia and his introduction to Escobar's world when Maria (Claudia Traisac), the girl he's fallen for, turns out to be the drug lord's niece and ward. This section is the weakest by far, relying as it does on Hutcherson, generally



Traffic update: Benicio Del Toro

a passive (nay, stolid) actor, to convey the slow dawning of Nick's predicament. The most telling moment comes when Maria smilingly informs him of her uncle's business: "Pablo is just exporting a national product."

Maria may represent the wilful evasions of Escobar's supporters, born of economic desperation. But she's marginalised as a character, and so the film is denied a useful avenue. Di Stefano's eyes are fixed instead on 1991 and the action-thriller set-up in which Nick must emerge from his mission alive yet retain his innocence. Hutcherson wakes up for this, and it's a well-orchestrated, very tense sequence – yet this could be any film: it doesn't gain as much as it ought to from having a real-life monster as its villain.

Meanwhile Del Toro has produced a very different Latin American icon to accompany his Che Guevara. Whether playing the loving family man, cavorting in the pool with his children, creepily controlling every aspect of Nick and Maria's lives, telling a priest that he's keeping an eye on God, or spinning elaborate fantasies to justify killing everyone around him, Del Toro's Escobar is utterly compelling. But he's acting in a vacuum, if not another film entirely. ☹

Credits and Synopsis

Produced by
Dimitri Rassam
Written by
Andrea Di Stefano
Adaptation
Andrea Di Stefano
Francesca Marciano
Director of Photography
Luis Sansans
Edited by
David Brenner
Maryline Monthieux
Production Designer
Carlos Conti
Original Music
Max Richter
Production Sound Mixer
Alessandro Rolla
Costume Designer
Marylin Fitoussi

Chapter 2, Orange Studio, Pathé, Roxbury, Paradise Lost Film A.I.E. Nexus Factory, Jouror Développement With the participation of ICAA In co-production with Umedia In association with uFund With the participation of Tax Shelter du Gouvernement Fédéral de Belgique, Canal+, Ciné+
Executive Producers
Benicio Del Toro
Josh Hutcherson
Moritz Borman

Ana Girardot
Anne
Micke Moreno
Martin

In Colour
[2.35:1]
Part-subtitled

Distributor
Munro Film Services

French theatrical title
Paradise Lost

Cast
Benicio Del Toro
Pablo Escobar
Josh Hutcherson
Nick
Claudia Traisac
Maria
Brady Corbet
Dylan
Carlos Bardem
Drago

©Chapter 2, Orange Studio, Pathé Production, Norsean Plus S.L., Paradise Lost Film A.I.E. Nexus Factory, Umedia, Jouror Développement
Production Companies
Co-produced by

The late 1980s. Two Canadian brothers, Nick and Dylan, arrive in Medellín, Colombia, with plans to set up a surf camp. Nick meets local girl Maria, and they fall in love. She introduces him to her uncle and guardian Pablo Escobar.

Escobar, apparently a wealthy politician and philanthropist, welcomes Nick into his family and gives him a job on his estate. However, Maria eventually reveals that her uncle has made his wealth through exporting cocaine. By the time Nick realises the extent of Escobar's criminal empire and the violence that lies behind it, it is too late to extricate himself. He is by now engaged to Maria, and her uncle exerts a controlling influence over their lives.

In 1991 Escobar's drug dealing is exposed in the media; he embarks on a bloody war with the government. Dylan persuades Nick and Maria to leave Colombia with him and his girlfriend Anne. Before they can escape, Nick is summoned to Escobar, who has agreed to surrender himself to the authorities. Escobar orders Nick to take part in the operation to hide his wealth, killing any witnesses. A reluctant Nick drives into the countryside with a truck full of money.

After he has hidden his consignment, Nick spares his contact but discovers that he himself is also to be murdered. Dylan, Anne and their child are killed. Seriously wounded, Nick escapes to Medellín, and Maria – but more of Escobar's henchmen are waiting.

La Famille Bélier

France/Belgium 2014
Director: Eric Lartigau
Certificate 12A 105m 35s

Reviewed by Ginette Vincendeau

With more than 7 million viewers, *La Famille Bélier* was one of a group of hugely successful French films of 2014, a golden year for national production, with other mega-hits including ethnic comedy *Serial (Bad) Weddings* and Luc Besson's sci-fi thriller *Lucy*.

La Famille Bélier is the ultimate feelgood movie. Sixteen-year-old Paula Bélier (Louane Emera) is the speaking exception in a family of deaf-mute farmers in western France, the link to the outside world for mother Gigi (Karin Viard), father Rodolphe (François Damiens) and younger brother Quentin (Luca Gelberg). The family's perfect harmony is shattered, however, when music teacher Monsieur Thomasson (Eric Elmosnino) discovers Paula's singing talent and encourages her to enter a competition to join the French national radio choir – which she eventually does.

If this précis makes the film sound unbearably sentimental, that's because in many ways it is, despite its basis in a true-life story written by Victoria Bedos (who appears in a cameo). The Béliers are the perfect family. The parents are spirited and enterprising and, together with their son, all the more endearing because of their handicap, which they negotiate with a mixture of political awareness (they won't be patronised) and humour. The film layers this basic situation with three generic narratives, all designed to elicit sympathy. There are snippets of social comment, with Rodolphe running for mayor on a ticket of defending small farmers. To this, director Eric Lartigau, who made the successful 2006 romcom *I Do*, adds romance, as Paula falls for Gabriel (Ilian Bergala), falls out with him and then falls back in. Last but not least is the classic 'star is born' story, in which a savvy professional detects hidden talent in an 'ordinary' young woman and helps her overcome obstacles – here, the emotional wrench of leaving her family.

The choice of music in *La Famille Bélier* is also highly significant. Thomasson teaches his pupils songs by Michel Sardou, whom he calls, somewhat affectedly, "the Mozart of French chanson". Although Sardou's heyday was in the 1970s and 1980s, he is still popular today, mostly with an older, conservative audience. The film dwells on his love songs and wisely avoids his reactionary and colonialist opus. This nod to older viewers is cleverly matched by an address to younger ones, since Emera was a runner-up in the television contest *The Voice* (she has since launched a successful



Signing up: Louane Emera

Fantastic Four

USA/United Kingdom 2015

Director: Josh Trank

Certificate 12A 99m 50s

Reviewed by Kim Newman

Ten years on from Tim Story's bland *Fantastic Four* – which underperformed in comparison with *X-Men*, *Spider-Man* and *Iron Man* but still yielded a sequel, *Fantastic 4: Rise of the Silver Surfer* (also directed by Story) – 20th Century Fox reboots the Marvel Comics franchise with a drabber, half-hearted take on what was once trumpeted as “the world's greatest comics magazine”. As with Sony's *Amazing Spider-Man* films – and indeed Roger Corman's nearly unseen *The Fantastic Four* (1994) – there is a suspicion that the project exists only because, unless the studio gets FF films out regularly, rights revert to Marvel.

Story's films took their cues from Jack Kirby and Stan Lee's groundbreaking 1960s run on the title. This reimagining, however, owes more to the *Ultimate Fantastic Four* version created by Mark Millar, Brian Michael Bendis and Adam Kubert in 2004 – ironically as part of the ‘ultimate’ line that Marvel launched to move longstanding characters such as the X-Men and Spider-Man closer to the versions seen in the Fox and Sony movie adaptations. Among the tweaks carried over here is the decision to make the characters mostly younger – ie all the same age as Johnny Storm – and more committed to exploration and experiment than superheroics. Ironically, this film – directed by Josh Trank, of 2012's teen found-footage superhero revision *Chronicle* – casts young, talented stars as the leads but then downplays their youth and inexperience. Aside from the moment when Reed Richards (Miles Teller) says that everyone remembers Armstrong and Aldrin but no one recalls who built the Apollo rocket, the characters are surprisingly neutral and sober, far less ego-fuelled and erratic than their original 1961 counterparts.

Given general dissatisfaction with Story's *Fantastic Four*, it's perverse that Trank's should boil down to essentially the same plot: a revision of the origin story in which Dr Doom is exposed to the same phenomena that give Richards and the other heroes – brother and sister Johnny



Flame off: Michael B. Jordan

and Susan Storm, old friend Ben Grimm – their superpowers, transforming him into the world-threatening nemesis who inspires the four to combine their efforts to take him down. Admittedly, this is loosely the plot of *Chronicle* too. When Johnny exclaims, “Doom is stronger than any of us,” Reed points out that “he's not stronger than all of us” – a thin rationalisation for a flat finish in which, essentially, four formidable people gang up on one unstable one.

There are many jarring lapses: the exclusion of Susan from the pioneering trip to another dimension; the depiction of Ben as a bullying victim who learns his war cry (“It's clobbering time”) from an abusive brother; character arcs that stop dead when superpowers manifest; the deliberate exclusion of humour and charm from the mix (not even a Stan Lee cameo); the way the colour-blind casting of Michael B. Jordan as a black Johnny Storm/Human Torch distracts from the deracination of Jewish New Yorker Ben into from-nowhere Jamie Bell; and yet another origin story eating up a whole film to set up a more interesting sequel that's now unlikely to get the greenlight.

There has been a strikingly good approximation of the FF format – a family sitcom/soap with superheroics – in *The Incredibles* (2004). That now seems like the closest we're going to get to a great *Fantastic Four* movie. **S**

recording career, while publicly falling out with Sardou, labelling his song “corny”).

Like the contest judges who make palpable their contempt for Sardou, it is tempting to smirk at *La Famille Bélier*. Yet the sentimentality works, like the love songs, thanks to terrific acting by the experienced Viard and Damiens and newcomer Emera, with her spontaneous persona and lovely voice. At the film's climax, Emera sings ‘Je vole’ (‘I Fly’), one of Sardou's most affecting songs, about a child leaving home. She renders the words simultaneously in sign language for her parents, who watch her with tears rolling down their cheeks. At the Paris screening I attended at the end of last year, there was likewise not a dry eye in the auditorium. Not subtle – but moving and pleasurable. **S**

Credits and Synopsis

Produced by
Eric Jehlmann
Philippe Rousselet
Stéphanie Bernman

Written by

Victoria Bedos
Stanislas Carré
de Malberg

Original Story

Victoria Bedos

Adaptation

Eric Lartigau

Thomas Bidegain

Cinematographer

Romain Winding

Editor

Jennifer Augé

Art Director

Olivier Radot

Original Music

Evgueni Galperine

Sacha Galperine

Sound

Cyril Moisson

Fred Demolder

Dominique Gaboriau

Costumes

Anne Schotte

©Jerico, Mars

Films, France 2

Cinéma, Quarante

12 Films, Vendôme

Production, Nexus

Factory, uMedia

in association

with uFund

Production

Companies

Jerico & Mars Films

presents a co-

production of Jerico,

Mars Films, France

2 Cinéma, Quarante

12 Films, Vendôme

Production, Nexus

Factory, uMedia

in association

with uFund

With the

participation of

Canal+, Ciné+,

France Télévisions,

M6, D8

In association

with Manon 4

With the support

of Tax Shelter du

Gouvernement

Fédéral de Belgique

Produced with

the assistance of

Centre du Cinéma

et l'Audiovisuel de la

Fédération Wallonie-

Bruxelles and VOO

(TV-NET-TEL)

Cast

Karin Viard

Gigi

François Damiens

Rodolphe

Éric Elmosnino

Monsieur

Thomasson

Louane Emera

Paula Bélier

Roxane Duran

Mathilde

Ilian Bergala

Gabriel

Luca Gelberg

Quentin

Mar Sodupe

Mlle Dos Santos

Stéphan Wojtowicz

mayor

Jérôme Kircher

Dr Pugeot

Dolby Digital

In Colour

[1.85:1]

Subtitles

Distributor

E1 Films

Western France, the present. Teenager Paula Bélier lives on a farm with her mother Gigi, father Rodolphe and brother Quentin. All except her are deaf and mute. The Béliers are a close-knit family and, since Paula knows sign language, she deals with all their affairs, talking to suppliers and the bank, and helping to sell their cheeses at the market. Her father decides to run for mayor and is supported by the local community.

At school, Paula joins the choir, along with her best friend Mathilde, in part because she likes Parisian boy Gabriel, a gifted singer who is about to enter a contest to join the French national radio choir. Music teacher Monsieur Thomasson discovers that Paula is a talented soprano. He arranges for her to sing in a duet with Gabriel at the school fete and encourages her to enter the contest. Gabriel's voice breaks, and he withdraws from the competition; he and Paula fall out. When Paula tells her family about the possibility of the Parisian choir, they react with violent hostility, and she decides to withdraw too. Paula and Gabriel are reunited for the school fete, where their duet is a success. As a result, Paula's father decides to drive her to Paris for the contest. She wins over the judges with her rendition of a Michel Sardou song, ‘I Fly’.

She leaves home to go to Paris to join the choir.

Credits and Synopsis

Produced by
Simon Kinberg
Matthew Vaughn
Hutch Parker

Screenplay

Jeremy Slater

Simon Kinberg

Josh Trank

Director of

Photography

Matthew Jensen

Edited by

Elliot Greenberg

Stephen Rivkin

Production Designer

Chris Seagers

Music

Marco Beltrami

Philip Glass

Sound Mixer

Paul Ledford

Costume Designer

George L. Little

Visual Effects

MPC

Pixomondo

Rodeo FX

Visual Effects

& Animation

Created by

Weta Digital Ltd.

Stunt Co-ordinator

Jeff Dashnaw

Brian Machleit

©Twentieth

Century Fox Film

Corporation and

TSG Entertainment

Finance LLC

Production

Companies

Twentieth Century

Fox presents in

association with

Constantin Film and

Marvel Entertainment

a Marv Films, Kinberg

Genre, Robert

Kulzer production

In association with

TSG Entertainment

Executive Producer

Stan Lee

Cast

Miles Teller

Reed Richards,

‘Mister Fantastic’

Michael B. Jordan

Johnny Storm,

‘Human Torch’

Kate Mara

Sue Storm,

‘Invisible Woman’

Jamie Bell

Ben Grimm,

‘The Thing’

Toby Kebbell

Victor von Doom,

‘Dr Doom’

Reg E. Cathey

Dr Franklin Storm

Tim Blake Nelson

Dr Allen

Tim Heidecker

Mr Richards

Dolby Atmos

In Colour

[2.35:1]

Distributor

20th Century Fox

International (UK)

US, present day. Teenage genius Reed Richards is recruited by Dr Franklin Storm for the Baxter Institute, a science think-tank. Reed works with Storm's adopted daughter Susan, rebellious son Johnny and semi-estranged pupil Victor von Doom on a project to visit another dimension. Having perfected a dimensional travel device, Victor and Reed are annoyed when Nasa astronauts are scheduled to use it. With Johnny and Reed's childhood best friend Ben Grimm, they make an unauthorised trip. Victor is trapped in a strange dimension, while the

others – including Susan – are exposed to energies that alter them physically, giving them superhuman powers. Reed escapes, but government scientist Dr Allen encourages the others to work for the military.

A year later, Reed is captured and returned to Area 57, where the project is now located. A second dimensional probe brings back a deadly, altered Victor, who kills Dr Storm and Allen and plans to destroy the world. Reed rallies his friends to defeat Victor/Dr Doom. The four vow to stay together as a team.

The Gift

Director: Joel Edgerton
Certificate 15 108m 2s

Reviewed by Anton Bitel

In the opening scene of *The Gift*, as Simon (Jason Bateman) and Robyn (Rebecca Hall) view a stylish house in the hills of Los Angeles, Simon peers in from the porch at his wife, their faces close but separated by a glass sliding door, and he draws a little love heart in the condensation left by his breath. It is an endearing gesture, indicative of the couple's intimate proximity – but that invisible barrier between them also hints at a certain distance.

If, as they try to rebuild their home and start a family, Robyn is haunted by a recent history of pregnancy gone wrong and ensuing mental breakdown, then Simon too comes with ghosts from his past, embodied by Gordo (Joel Edgerton, also the film's writer and debuting director). Gordo, who went to the same high school as Simon (and whose childhood nickname 'Weirdo' was the film's working title), runs into the couple as they, significantly, are buying furniture for their new home, and then keeps popping up unannounced, simultaneously charming Robyn and irritating Simon with his gift-bearing presence.

The visual motif of the glass barrier also keeps appearing. Gordo's face replaces Simon's in the window as he visits every day. Later, we see Robyn rubbing steam off the shower's glass door only to discern that the figure standing on the other side is not Simon but Gordo. A key conversation between Simon and Robyn, as her suspicions about him grow, takes place with Robyn addressing not the husband beside her but his reflection in the bathroom mirror. And the last time the film shows the couple in the same place, they are again separated by a pane of glass. Even as Gordo is set up to be the classic villainous interloper, his deceit and insidious aggression keep finding their mirror image in Simon, whose veneer of middle-class respectability we see through a glass darkly. Only when the transparent doors of his home are violently shattered is Simon finally revealed



Rebecca Hall, Jason Bateman, Joel Edgerton

for who he really is – and is himself left broken.

Here Edgerton, who has honed his craft penning *The Square* (2008), *Felony* (2013) and *The Rover* (2014), has taken a subgenre normally associated with cheap sensationalist thrills and stripped it down to intense character drama. A pot bubbles over, goldfish die, a beloved pet mysteriously vanishes – all signifying that Gordo's creepy infiltrator will conform to the type of the 'bunny boiler'. But instead of becoming a crazed killer like the male antagonists in, say, *Pacific Heights* (1990), *Unlawful Entry* (1992), *Harry, He's Here to Help* (2000), *Le Serpent* (2006) or *Coffin Rock* (2009), Gordo prefers to observe quietly, offering a parodic simulacrum of Simon's own bullying, manipulative practices – which, in a subversive touch, define Simon as a winner in the vicious hierarchies of the playground and the corporate ladder. Ultimately, the tensions in *The Gift* aren't artificially resolved in an unrestrained climax. Rather the seeds of doubt – sown by Simon, symmetrically replanted by Gordo – remain exposed under glass. **S**

Credits and Synopsis

Produced by
Jason Blum
Rebecca Yeldham
Joel Edgerton
Written by
Joel Edgerton
Director of Photography
Eduard Grau
Editor
Luke Doolan
Production Designer

Richard Sherman
Music
Danny Bensi
Saunders Jurriaans
Supervising Sound Editor
Julian Slater
Costume Designer
Terry Anderson

Production Companies

STX Entertainment
and Blumhouse
Productions present
a Joel Edgerton film
Executive Producers
Jeanette Volturmo-Brill
Couper Samuelson
Luc Etienne
Robert Simonds
Adam Fogelson
Oren Aviv

Cast
Jason Bateman
Simon
Rebecca Hall
Robyn
Joel Edgerton
Gordo
Allison Tolman
Lucy
Wendell Pierce
Detective Mills

Tim Griffin
Kevin Keelor
Beau Knapp
Detective Walker
Adam Lazarre-White
Ron
Katie Aselton
Joan
P.J. Byrne
Danny
David Denman
Greg

Busy Philipps
Duffy

In Colour
[2.35:1]

Distributor
Lionsgate UK

Los Angeles, the present. Having relocated from Chicago, Simon and Robyn are moving into their new home when Simon is spotted by Gordo, who went to high school with him years ago. To Simon's great irritation, Gordo starts visiting unannounced and leaving gifts for the couple, including koi for their pond. He invites them to dinner at his surprisingly affluent home – which in fact belongs neither to him nor, as he eventually claims, to his ex-wife. Simon warns Gordo to stay away. The koi are poisoned. Simon and Robyn's dog goes missing – but returns unharmed, with a letter from Gordo stating that he has good intentions and is prepared to forgive what happened in the past. Robyn discovers that she is

pregnant. Having earlier suffered a failed pregnancy, she becomes increasingly insomniac and paranoid. She discovers that Simon has had secret background checks carried out on both Gordo and Danny, a rival for a work promotion; she also discovers that at school Simon spread a false rumour that Gordo was gay, with devastating consequences. Robyn insists that Simon apologise to Gordo, but instead Simon attacks him. Danny disrupts a dinner celebrating Simon's promotion, accusing Simon of fabricating slanderous reports about him. Robyn goes into labour, and tells Simon she wants him to leave. Simon is fired. Gordo leaves Simon a gift-wrapped video implying that Gordo may be the father of Robyn's newborn son.

A Girl at My Door

Republic of Korea 2014
Director: July Jung
Certificate 18 119m 16s

Reviewed by Tony Rayns

Obviously Bae Doona's major contributions to Korean cinema to date have been her wonderful performances in such films as *Barking Dogs Never Bite* and *The Host*, both for Bong Joonho. She has also done outstanding work in two Japanese films, Yamashita Nobuhiro's *Linda, Linda, Linda* and Koreeda Hirokazu's *Air Doll*, and she's lately appeared in *Cloud Atlas*. But the moment that consolidated her status as a heroine of Korean film culture was arguably her refusal to make a cameo appearance in Park Chanwook's *Lady Vengeance*; she was the only star from the first two films of Park's so-called 'revenge trilogy' (she was in *Sympathy for Mr Vengeance*) who declined to appear in the wrap-up movie. This is pure speculation, but it's tempting to imagine that her refusal was prompted by discovering the fatuous caricature of a sadistic lesbian in the script for that film. If that happens to be the real reason, then accepting the role of a lesbian police chief in July Jung's debut feature could be seen as her delayed response to Park Chanwook's uninviting proposal.

Jung has written police chief Lee Youngnam as an interestingly flawed character. She opens her film with Youngnam's arrival in a small fishing town, accidentally drenching a strange-looking teenager by driving through a puddle, and ends it with Youngnam driving to her next posting, now with Dohee, that same teenager, sleeping in the passenger seat. Youngnam's lesbianism is established early in the film – she attends a debrief on the 'scandal' which led to her transfer to Sticksville; her saturnine male superior is played in a cameo by Moon Sungkuen, axiom of Korean leftist cinema – although the force's policy of sweeping such issues under the carpet isn't clarified or questioned. The more serious issue of her drinking is broached equally directly when she's seen at night in her parked car, decanting many small bottles of *soju* liquor into empty two-litre Evian bottles. Her ex-girlfriend Eunjung later bitterly accuses her of running away from her problems and drinking. The judgement seems spot-on.

But Jung has contrived a moral maze of a plot which obliges Youngnam to take a series of difficult decisions – and thus, implicitly, to stand her ground. The girl Dohee is central to most of them. She presents first as an abused child in need of protection from both school bullying and physical abuse by her stepfather and grandmother, stirring Youngnam's feminist feelings. There's no suggestion of sexual attraction, at least not initially, but the girl's natural need for affection compromises Youngnam's professional need to remain visibly celibate. Matters are further complicated by (a) the stepfather's chance discovery that Youngnam is lesbian, and (b) Youngnam's realisation that Dohee, like many abused children, is cunningly manipulative, wishful and naive enough to believe that seeking punishment is a way of affirming a relationship. Youngnam even comes to suspect that Dohee has somehow engineered her hated step-grandmother's death. A subplot about the stepfather's exploitation of illegal-immigrant workers in the town's fish farm adds a rather perfunctory sliver of social commentary to the film, but serves chiefly as the pretext for

Horse Money

Portugal 2014
Director: Pedro Costa

See Feature
on page 48

Reviewed by Nick Pinkerton

"We'll keep on falling from the third floor. We'll keep on being severed by the machines. Our head and lungs will still hurt the same... We'll be burned... We'll go crazy. It's all the mould in the walls of our houses... We have always lived and we will always die like this. It's our sickness."

This is how one of a congregated group of Cape Verdean immigrant labourers describe their lot in Pedro Costa's *Horse Money*, a film that might be subtitled 'A Universal History of Poverty'. Costa's film begins with an overture of images by the Danish-American photographer Jacob Riis, showing the bare, stifling tenements of New York City a century ago, yet not so far from the scenes in the Fontainhas slums in Lisbon to which Costa has returned time and again. This precedes *Horse Money*'s 'contemporary' narrative, which begins with Costa's star and muse Ventura, wearing nothing but a pair of red briefs, descending a gloomy stairwell into the bowels of what at first looks like a stone-walled medieval dungeon, though from one shot to another it may change to appear as a clean, modern hospital.

Costa's fifth collaboration with Ventura, following 2006's *Colossal Youth*, is set in a liminal zone somewhere between life and death, past and present – and the manner in which the past haunts the present is the very fabric of the film. The principal characters, Cape Verdeans all, are haunted by the memory of home. Ventura, who seems to imagine himself on the brink of final judgement (a woman, Vitalina, brings him unwelcome memories and warns him that he is on "the road to perdition"), is haunted by the memory of a knife fight in the mid-70s in which he acquired a headful of stitches and took his opponent out of the workforce. Even the city itself is haunted by its history in the form of its stone monuments, one of which, a lantern-jawed revolutionary soldier, is seen to berate Ventura without his lips moving.

Horse Money is a movie of people nursing injuries that have never properly healed, injuries that may even have been fatal. If Ventura isn't literally a ghost – something his character is trying to ascertain throughout the film – he is certainly one of society's innumerable walking wounded, working through his own variety of PTSD, a civilian veteran of a 40-year-old revolution which, for the Cape Verdeans, just meant more of the same. The film places the viewer in a position to ask the same questions that Ventura's character is asking himself – am I alive? Have I lived? Its recurring image is that of Ventura shuffling along empty corridors, places that might be closed for the night or abandoned outright. Though periodically visited by splashes of red – Ventura's underpants, the crimson shirt worn by his knife-fight opponent – the film's palette is subdued and sombre, dominated by institutional off-white and mahogany, while the profoundly black night provides a backdrop for some of the most magnificently photographed ebony skin in recent cinema – and blackness is very much among the film's subjects. I first saw *Horse Money* a year ago at the Toronto International Film Festival, which occurred at the same time as protests surrounding the death of unarmed



Relocation: Kim Sae Ron, Doona Bae

the abusive stepfather to denounce Youngnam as a predatory paedophile – a development which provokes the story's climactic twists and turns.

The only real problem with all this is that it's too schematic. Jung is known in Korea for her prize-winning feminist shorts, but it's harder to sustain a straightforward cause-and-effect narrative at feature length than it is in a short. Jung's mentors here are the Lee brothers – director Lee Changdong, producer Lee Jundong, both credited as executive producers – and it's clear that she was reaching for something along the lines of Lee Changdong's *Secret Sunshine* or *Poetry*. But whatever its moral complexities, *A Girl at My Door* lacks the nuanced sense of everyday ups and downs that's so strong in Lee's

films. Nothing here happens without a defined narrative purpose, and the feeling that a moral conundrum is being mechanically worked out is hard to shake. The best you can say for the by-the-numbers plotting is that it's mercifully free of didacticism and open to moral ambiguities.

Still, as a debut feature this is an achievement by any measure. The script may seem over-determined, but the performances are not: Kim Saeron catches Dohee's demonic side as vividly as her tarnished innocence, and Song Saebyuk couldn't be bettered as the archetypal loudmouthed drunk who enjoys beating up those weaker than himself. A few compositions aside, Jung avoids clichés and platitudes. And then there's Bae Doona. **S**

Credits and Synopsis

Producers

Lee Changdong
Lee Joondong

Screenplay

July Jung

Cinematography

Kim Hyunseok

Editing

Lee Younglim

Production Design

Yoon Sang Yoon

Music

Jang Younggyu

Sound Recording

Kim Hyun Sang

Costume Design

Kim Ha Kyung

©Pinehouse Film Co.,
Ltd & Nowfilm Co., Ltd

Production Companies

MovieCollage,
Pinehouse Film and
Timewise Investment
presents a Pinehouse,
Now Films production

Executive Producers

Simon Lee
Lee Joondong
Shin Kang Yeong

Cast

Doona Bae
Inspector Lee

Youngnam

Kim Sae Ron

Kim Dohee

Song Sae Byuk

Park Yongha

Moon Seonggeun

police superintendent

Jang Hee Jin

Eunjeong

In Colour

[1.85:1]

Subtitles

Distributor

Peccadillo Pictures

Korean theatrical title

Dohui-ya

Korea, now. Outed as a lesbian, police chief Lee Youngnam is transferred from Seoul to the police station in a seaside village. She soon encounters the three members of the Park family: the batty old matriarch, succumbing to Alzheimer's; her violent, alcoholic son Yongha, foreman in a local fish farm; and Sun Dohee, an abandoned teenager informally adopted by Yongha – and frequently beaten by him and his mother. When Youngnam (who also drinks heavily) stops Yongha from beating Dohee, the girl starts following her around. On the night that Yongha's mother dies in an apparent road accident, Dohee comes to Youngnam's door, asking for sanctuary. Youngnam takes her in and sees her bruised body; she allows the girl to stay temporarily. Youngnam's ex-lover Eunjung

turns up, hoping they can start over as a couple in Australia; Yongha happens to see them kissing before Eunjung leaves alone. Illegal immigrant worker Bakeem runs amok, demanding back-pay from Yongha so that he can return home; later Youngnam has Yongha arrested for beating Bakeem, and he reciprocally accuses her of sexually molesting Dohee, a minor. Youngnam is held for questioning, and Dohee's naive testimony about their relationship seems to confirm her guilt. But when Dohee realises what is happening, she arranges for Yongha to be caught apparently in the act of sexually abusing her. Yongha is duly arrested, and Youngnam is released. Facing another transfer, Youngnam says goodbye to Dohee... and then impulsively invites the girl to come with her to her next posting.

How to Change the World

United Kingdom/Canada/The Netherlands/Australia 2015

Director: Jerry Rothwell

Certificate 15 109m 58s

Reviewed by Ros Cranston

This pacy documentary tells the story of the accidental origins of the global campaigning organisation Greenpeace, and it licks along like an eco-powered action movie – full of far-fetched schemes and desperate moments when all seems lost. It is the sometimes jaw-dropping story of an assortment of young idealists, drawn in the early 1970s from Vancouver's sizeable population of "tree huggers, draft-dodgers, shit-disturbing unionists, radical students, garbage dump stoppers, freeway fighters, pot smokers, vegetarians, nudists, Buddhists, fish preservationists and back-to-the-landers", as Bob Hunter, one of the co-founders, puts it. "The revolution will not be organised" is one of the five rules adopted by the motley crew.

Director Jerry Rothwell has traversed varied terrain with his previous documentary features, ranging from *Donor Unknown* (2010), in which a young American woman traced her sperm-donor father and her many half-siblings, to his recent focus on aspiring young athletes in the Ethiopian highlands in *Town of Runners* (2012). With *How to Change the World* he takes on the entire globe, basing the film around extensive use of potent archive footage drawn chiefly from the activists' own remarkable documenting of their perilous adventures. The film is deftly structured, interlacing this archive footage with contemporary interviews with key protagonists, their flowing 70s hairstyles now considerably shorter and greyer, and often giving different accounts of the same events. Hunter died in 2005, but he is represented by eloquent extracts from his journalism and diaries – and his articulate, intense, self-doubting musings provide the vulnerable, searching heart of the film, in finely balanced contrast with moments of high drama.

They may have been unworldly in many ways, but the activists were media-savvy from the outset. On their first mission to sail to the site of US nuclear bomb testing at Amchitka, Alaska, they are angry and upset by their failure to reach their destination. Crucially, however, Hunter manages to keep in touch with journalists from their barely seaworthy vessel – and the group find themselves greeted as heroes by hundreds of people on their return to Vancouver a few days later. One of Hunter's colleagues later describes how "Bob looked at our little world as if making a movie" – complete with narrative arc and defined character roles. The recognition that media coverage was more important in achieving change than their campaigning exploits alone proved to be the secret of the group's success in turning Greenpeace into an international phenomenon – stories of their exploits led news bulletins right from the start.

It is the intrepid and probably foolhardy voyage to confront Russian whalers off the Californian coast that's at the heart of the film. Finding the location of the whaling fleet involves espionage, prolonged spells of boredom and even hunger for the activists aboard their boat, as well as the risk of running out of fuel before finding their target. Once a whaling ship is sighted the activists are quick to apply another of their rules: "Put your body where your mouth is." The result is iconic footage of a Russian harpoonist aiming



Night ward: Tito Furtado, Ventura

African-American teenager Michael Brown by a police officer in Ferguson, Missouri. The scene in which the nearly nude and wholly harmless Ventura, surrounded by paramilitary forces at a dark crossroads, responds with the universal gesture that would become Ferguson's "Hands up, don't shoot" protest chant, was never out of my mind for long in the year to come.

Largely nocturnal and underlit, *Horse Money* is full of striking chiaroscuro and other effects: a backdrop of apartment-block windows that look uncannily like cut-outs, or dancing pinpricks of light caught in the eyes of characters who might otherwise seem near-zombified. Much of

the dialogue is delivered in whispers, as when Vitalina, speaking in a cadenced hiss, recites the story of her and her late husband's lives in the language of death, birth and marriage certificates.

It is a sumptuous piece of work that leaves Costa open to the charge of 'aestheticising poverty' – an accusation usually levelled by people who prefer to ignore the fact that the poor have an inconvenient habit of aestheticising themselves, like Ventura in his dandyish, cock-of-the-walk ruffle shirt. It's a film of people who begin and end their days by night, living and dying known and remembered by a precious few, displaying their beauty, their only inalienable property. **S**

Credits and Synopsis

Producer
Abel Ribeiro Chaves
Written by
Pedro Costa
Directors of Photography
Leonardo Simões
Pedro Costa
Editor
João Dias

Sound
Olivier Blanc
Vasco Pedrosa

Production Companies
Sociedade Óptica
Técnica
Financially supported by

Instituto do Cinema e do Audiovisual and Rádio e Televisão de Portugal with the support of Fundação Calouste Gulbenkian and Câmara Municipal de Lisboa
Executive Producer

Rodrigo Dâmaso

Cast
Ventura
Vitalina Varela
Vitalina
Tito Furtado
Joaquín

António Santos
living statue
Benvindo Tavares
Benvindo

In Colour
[1.33:1]
Subtitles
Distributor

Second Run

Portuguese theatrical title
Cavalo dinheiro

Lisbon, Portugal, present day. Ventura, a retired middle-aged immigrant labourer from Cape Verde with an uncontrollable tremor in his hands, has been confined to a hospital bed, where he is visited by friends. Questioned by a doctor, he states that he is 19 years old, and that, improbably, he was brought in by the MFA revolutionary army, the organisation that started the military coup in 1974. His surroundings appear sometimes as a hospital, sometimes as a prison. Ventura is joined in this purgatory by Vitalina, a woman of a similar age who has travelled to Portugal for her husband's funeral. She recites to Ventura the events of a knife fight in which he was involved as a teenager, and in which he disabled

another man; we see the after-effects of the fight in flashback, as Ventura hides from the police. After a musical interlude during which the inhabitants of the Fontainhas neighbourhood present themselves to the camera, Ventura visits the dilapidated offices of the construction company that he used to work for. Ventura encounters his godchild, who states that he has been waiting 20 years for his salary. Ventura is stuck in a lift with the sentient statue of a soldier, who causes him to doubt whether his adult life ever occurred.

In the hospital cafeteria, Ventura feeds soup to a man who appears to be his old knife-fight opponent. Telling the man that he's been discharged, Ventura steps out into the night.



A whale of a tale: *How to Change the World*

just above the heads of Greenpeace members bobbing in their dinghy between the whale and the whaling ship. They'd got the shot – and the modern ecology movement was born.

"Fear success" is the third of the rules around which the film is structured, and the underlying conflicts in the group, exacerbated by increased success, are colourfully evoked and sometimes scarcely credible. Who could have predicted that one of the early members of Greenpeace would become a spokesperson for climate-change deniers? Even Bob Hunter, the inspired generator of incredible storylines, couldn't have dreamt up that bizarre sting in the tail. **S**

Credits and Synopsis

Produced by

Al Morrow
Bous De Jong

Written by

Jerry Rothwell

Based on the

writings of

Bob Hunter

Director of

Photography

Ben Lichty

Editor

James Scott

Composer

Lesley Barber

Sound Recordists

Daniel Hewitt

Chris Miller

©How to Change the

World Ltd, Insight

Greenpeace Doc

Ltd, The British Film

Institute, British Sky

Broadcasting Ltd

Production

Companies

BFI and Sky present

in association with

Impact Partners,

Shark Island

Productions and

Bell Media a Met

Film, Daniel Film and

Insight Productions

co-production

A film by Jerry

Rothwell

Made with the

support of Impact

Partners

Developed at the

Discovery Campus

Masterschool 2008

Developed with

the support of the

Media Program of

the European Union

Supported by a

grant from the

Sundance Institute

Documentary

Film Program

with additional

funding from

Candescent Films

With the

participation of

Ontario Media

Development

Corporation

Produced in

association with

Impact Partners,

Shark Island

Productions, Bell

Media, Met Film,

Daniel Film, Insight

Productions

Made with the

support of the

BFI's Film Fund

Executive

Producers

Jonny Persey

Stewart Le Maréchal

David Nicholas

Wilkinson

John Brunton

Barbara Bowlby

for BFI:

Christopher Collins

Lizzie Francke

for Sky:

Lorraine

Charker-Phillips

Celia Taylor

for Impact Partners:

Dan Cogan

for Shark Island

Productions:

Ian Darling

Cast

Barry Pepper

voice of Bob Hunter

In Colour and

Black & White

[1.85:1]

Distributor

Picturehouse

Entertainment

Infini

Australia 2014

Director: Shane Abbess

Reviewed by Samuel Wigley

This shouty and overwrought sci-fi thriller from Australia takes place in the 23rd century, when widespread poverty has encouraged some to take dangerous jobs teleporting to galactic colonies. On a bad first day at a mining facility, expectant father Whit Carmichael (Daniel MacPherson of *Neighbours*) finds himself whizzing to the remote outpost of Infini after all his new colleagues are wiped out in a clash with returning teleporters who've been possessed by something horrible in the far reaches of the galaxy.

Taking its cues from a familiar constellation of deep-space classics from *Solaris* and *Alien* onwards, Shane Abbess's film confuses from the outset, never adequately drawing the battle lines of its increasingly mind-boggling thesis. It's something about a predatory space ooze that's infecting everyone who sets foot on the lonely Infini space station, but there's so little differentiation between the characters who are sent to rescue Whit that the matter of who gets infected, and why it matters, is moot. We only care about Whit himself because cuts to his pregnant wife back on Earth and blasts of anxiety-inducing music seem to require it. **S**

Luke Hemsworth



Credits and Synopsis

Produced by

Matthew Graham

Bret Thornquest

Sidonie Abbene

Shane Abbess

Written by

Shane Abbess

Story

Brian Cachia

Shane Abbess

Director of

Photography

Carl Robertson

Editor

Adrian Rositrollo

Production

Designer

George Liddle

Original Music

Score

Brian Cachia

Sound Designer

Sasha Zastavnikovic

Costume Designer

Shareen Beringer

©Storm Vision

Entertainment

Pty Ltd

Production

Companies

Storm Alley and

Eclectic Vision

present a Storm

Vision Entertainment

production

A Shane Abbess film

Executive

Producers

Brian Cachia

Steven Matusko

Cast

Daniel MacPherson

Whit Carmichael

Grace Huang

Claire Grenich

Luke Hemsworth

Charlie Kent

Dwaine Stevenson

Rex Mannings

Kevin Copeland

Seet Johanson

Harry Pavlidis

Harris Menzies

Louise Mignone

Phillipa Boxen

Bren Foster

Morgan Jacklar

Luke Ford

Chester Huntington

Dolby Digital

In Colour

[2.35:1]

Distributor

Altitude Film

Distribution

The 23rd century. With his wife expecting a baby, Whit Carmichael has taken a lucrative but dangerous job at a mining facility in deep space. After a lethal attack by a returning crew who have become mysteriously infected during an expedition, Whit escapes on his own to the Infini space station. A rescue team arrives on Infini to fetch him and prevent the station's lethal payload from being launched on to Earth. They find scenes of destruction. Whit explains that a deadly contagion compelled the crew to destroy each other. As the members of the rescue team also become affected, Whit works out how to reverse the infection. The rescue team take Whit back to Earth.

Just Jim

United Kingdom 2015

Director: Craig Roberts

Certificate 15 84m 12s

Reviewed by Roger Clarke

Not every 24-year-old gets to write, direct and act in his own movie, but when you've been the star of indie hit *Submarine* (2010), the world is your oyster. This time Craig Roberts is Jim, a more grown-up teenager fretting about his isolation and unpopularity in small-town Wales – it's a familiar tale of a heterosexual geek trying to square his oddness with the straightness of the straight world.

Roberts these days has the face of a silent comedian – wide, expressive and melancholy – while still looking very young for his age. He photographs himself well but there's a dampness about Jim, a kind of mildew caught from the chronic indifference of his parents. The world seems to get better for this boy-man, whose solitary hobbies include haunting a creepy rep cinema, when a glamorous neighbour arrives in the form of Dean.

Played by Emile Hirsch as a 1950s bad boy, Dean at first helps Jim, wielding a gun at his fellow schoolboys so he can win a cross-country race. "Maybe you just need to man up a bit – stop being a little bitch," Dean tells him, encouragingly. But when Jim realises that Dean has killed his dog and is turning his parents against him, something has to be done. To what extent Dean is a fantasy figure who doesn't really exist is never fully resolved, but Jim's fumbling incompetence when it comes to dating a pink-haired local girl, annoying his friends and being bored by his oddly two-dimensional parents is very real. There are many obvious fantasy sequences (one recurring motif has Jim suspended underwater in a shaft of light) and the fake *noir* film-within-a-film has been created with some relish.

Cinematically it all looks rich and pleasing to the eye. There's dollying, zooming, handheld and static nature-gulping landscape shots – with a full toolkit at his disposal, Roberts denies himself nothing, and strangely, far from being an irritant to the viewer, there's something rather lovely in the sheer pleasure he takes in the medium. Music, lighting and occasional themes suggest a large debt to David Lynch – a master who remains an unfortunate influence on the young and unwary. Admirable attention is paid to costume – sometimes it seems as if the



A helping hand: Craig Roberts

A documentary charting the early days of the Greenpeace environmental movement, beginning with the exploits of a small group of friends in the early 1970s. The group's initial protest against US nuclear testing in Alaska is followed by a reckless boat trip to confront Russian whalers. Their powerful images of their actions – such as a dinghy in front of a large whaling ship – are picked up by the media, leading to the rapid expansion of Greenpeace. However, there is increasing conflict among the founding members of the group: one of them forms an alternative campaigning organisation, while another advises big corporations and is regarded by his former friends as having sold out.

characters are dressed for the 50s, then the 70s, and the exact period of the film is kept deliberately vague. The veridical hallucination is never far away, the timeframe is skewed by teenage angst, and inner reality always finds an external expression (for example in Jim's horrible bedroom, which is like a room in a derelict house). In his relationship with Dean, there is also a batsqueak of sublimated homoeroticism. When Dean encourages Jim to wear earrings, the "gay side" of the face is discussed – in a disparaging way, it goes without saying.

Does Jim kill this interloper, this family-seducer and psychopath, in his effort to negotiate small-town stasis without giving in to decay? We never really know, but the film ends with a couple of scenes that suggest order has been restored. *Just Jim* is a very creditable second act to a sparkling debut of youthful promise, but whether Roberts feels that his career lies on both sides of the camera, or just one, seems yet to be resolved. This critic feels that directing may be the stronger pull. **S**

Credits and Synopsis

Produced by
Pip Broughton
Adrian Bate
Written by
Craig Roberts
Director of Photography
Richard Stoddard
Editor
Stephen Haren
Production Designer
Arwel Jones
Original Music Composed and Conducted by
Michael Price
Sound
Bryn Thomas
Richard Brooks
Tim Surrey
Costume Designer
Sian Jenkins

© Just Jim Productions
Production Companies
A Film Cymru Wales, Edicis, Soda Pictures, BBC Films, S4C, BFI presentation
Vox Pictures presents a Craig Roberts film
A Vox Pictures production
Made with the support of the

National Lottery through the Arts Council of Wales, Film Cymru Wales, BFI's Film Fund, Edicis, Soda Pictures and BBC under the Cinematic Scheme
Executive Producers
Adam Partridge
Steve Jenkins
Edward Fletcher
Paul Higgins
Gwawr Martha Lloyd

Cast
Emile Hirsch
Dean
Craig Roberts
Jim
Aneirin Hughes
dad
Mark Lewis Jones
Donald
Richard Harrington
headmaster
Nia Roberts
mum
Charlotte Randall
Jackie
Ryan Owen
Michael
Sai Bennett
Michelle
Helen Griffin
Beatrice
Matthew Aubrey

Leon
Trystan Gravelle
John
Richard Lynch
Wayne
William Thomas
Sammy

In Colour
[2.35:1]

Distributor
Soda Pictures

Wales, present day. Teenager Jim lives in a small town. He is alienated from his parents and finds it hard to make friends at school. Life becomes more exciting when a mysterious young man, Dean, comes to stay next door and takes Jim under his wing, encouraging him to date girls. Dean also helps him cheat during a school cross-country race, which Jim wins. However, it becomes clear that Dean is turning Jim's parents against him, and it appears that he has killed his dog; he encourages Jim's parents to have him institutionalised. When Dean takes Jim's parents to the cinema, Jim lures him out and then assaults him, tumbling him into the boot of Dean's car. In a dreamlike sequence, Jim appears to have both killed and not killed Dean, before everything returns to normal, with Jim running in the school race once again.

Legend

France/United Kingdom 2015
Director: Brian Helgeland

See Feature on page 38

Reviewed by Lisa Mullen

If the Krays hadn't existed, cinema would have had to invent them. The appeal of these East End gangsters must have been distinctly dubious

in real life, but as gothic emanations of post-war Britain they are irresistible. US writer-director Brian Helgeland comes to the story with an outsider's sense of gleeful amazement, presenting the brothers as the slick, cuff-shooting geezers captured by David Bailey – images that are knowingly referenced in the film to acknowledge the debt. Bailey was fascinated by the uncanny doubleness of these sinisterly dapper men, and Helgeland is too: his version of Reggie has all the ambition and the cold calculation, while Ronnie is his dark doppelganger, simmering constantly with unfocused rage and pulling his brother back down into hell whenever he seems to be on the point of scrambling into the light.

Tom Hardy emphasises this good twin/bad twin distinction by playing (arguably overplaying) the psychopathic Ronnie as a mumbling, barely human force of nature, pathologically incapable of empathy or judgement. Reggie, in contrast, is debonair and charming, easily capable of schmoozing the punters at his nightclub just seconds after beating one of his underlings senseless. If Ronnie is the devil, Reggie is certainly no angel, though Hardy does such a good job of deploying his puppy eyes that you almost understand why the teenage Frances (Emily Browning) marries him. Almost. There's something worryingly empty about this romantic liaison, which never seems as authentic as the twins' overwrought relationship with each other. The film is told from Frances's point of view, with Browning providing a voiceover narration, yet there is surprisingly little insight into her decision to tie herself to such a dangerous man. We see her lured by the brassy razzle-dazzle of the Krays' milieu, and by Reggie's legendary status, but we don't have any way of understanding what kind of



Double trouble: Tom Hardy

absence such things might be compensating for.

Reggie, as it turns out, wasn't particularly interested in Frances beyond the conquest stage, and Helgeland seems to feel the same way. It's far more entertaining to sit back and enjoy the Krays' tornado-like passage through London's high and low society – so that's exactly what we're given. The mid-1960s are evoked in luscious, salivating detail, with designer Tom Conroy and cinematographer Dick Pope seemingly locked in a battle to show who loves the era's plasticky glamour the most. The contrast between the shabby terraced streets and industrial warehouses of the East End and the fantasy of wealth and power the Krays conjure up like a cloud of pixie dust everywhere they go is beautifully realised, telling a story that the screenplay otherwise tends not to dwell on.

Such enchantment can't last, anyway; the Krays peddle bad faith and black magic. While their criminal scrapes begin as semi-comic capers, they soon veer into darker territory, with Christopher Eccleston (underused but memorable) hot on their heels as their law-enforcement nemesis, Inspector Nipper of the Yard. By calling his film *Legend*, Helgeland makes it clear that he wants to tell a kind of fairytale, but by the end, the brutal reality of the Krays' criminal instincts is all too clear. **S**

Credits and Synopsis

Produced by
Tim Bevan
Eric Fellner
Chris Clark
Quentin Curtis
Brian Oliver
Written by
Brian Helgeland
Based on the book *The Profession of Violence* by John Pearson
Director of Photography
Dick Pope
Edited by

Peter McNulty
Production Designer
Tom Conroy
Music
Carter Burwell
Production Sound Mixer
Danny Hambrook
Costume Designer
Caroline Harris
Stunt/Fight Co-ordinator
Julian Spencer

©StudioCanal S.A.
Production

Companies
StudioCanal presents in association with Anton Capital Entertainment and Amazon Prime Instant Video a Working Title production
A Brian Helgeland film
Executive Producers
Kate Solomon
Amelia Granger
Liza Chasin
Olivier Courson
Ron Halpern
Tom Hardy

Tyler Thompson
Timmy Thompson

Cast

Tom Hardy
Reginald Kray,
'Reggie'/'Ronald Kray', 'Ronnie', 'Ron'
Emily Browning
Frances Shea
David Thewlis
Leslie Payne
Christopher Eccleston
Nipper Read

Chazz Palminteri
Angelo Bruno
Paul Anderson
Albert Donoghue
Colin Morgan
Frank Shea
Mel Raido
Ian Barrie
Sam Spruell
Jack McVitie
Tara Fitzgerald
Mrs Shea
Duffy
Timi Yuro
Taron Egerton
Mad Teddy Smith

Kevin McNally
Harold Wilson
John Sessions
Lord Boothby

Dolby Atmos In Colour
[2.35:1]

Distributor
StudioCanal Limited

London, the 1960s. Twins Ronnie and Reggie Kray rule the East End underworld with an iron fist. But while Reggie is smooth and ruthless, Ronnie suffers from undiagnosed mental health problems, which make him prone to irrational mood swings and violent rampages. Reggie falls in love with his driver's teenage sister Frances. Her family fear that no good will come of the match, but she falls for Reggie's charm and status in the neighbourhood, and they marry. For a while Reggie seems determined to concentrate on a semi-legitimate nightclub

business, but this aspiration is wrecked by Ronnie's bizarre behaviour. Reggie's marriage also turns sour: he neglects Frances yet expects unquestioning obedience from her, until finally she leaves him. When he tries to persuade her to return, she commits suicide. Meanwhile Ronnie's uncontrollable temper results in the public murder of a gang rival. Finally giving in to his dark side, Reggie participates in another murder at a party. Scotland Yard's Nipper Read, who has been hounding the twins throughout their career, finally has grounds to charge them.

The Man from U.N.C.L.E.

USA 2015

Director: Guy Ritchie

Certificate 12A 116m 18s

Reviewed by Kim Newman

The James Bond superspy phenomenon of the 1960s inspired several popular TV series. Most prominent was *The Man from U.N.C.L.E.*, notionally developed by Ian Fleming, who provided the names 'Napoleon Solo' ('Mr Solo' was a gangster in *Goldfinger*) and 'April Dancer' (later, the Girl from U.N.C.L.E. in a spin-off series), but actually created by Sam Rolfe. The show ran for four seasons, from 1964 to 1968, changing tone from relatively serious to outrageous camp as it went from black-and-white to colour, then sobering up again for its final episodes. It made lasting TV stars and icons of cool out of Robert Vaughn, previously the least magnificent of *The Magnificent Seven*, who played Solo, and David McCallum, sporting a blond Beatle cut as his Russian-agent partner Illya Kuryakin. It was also a career-defining last act for character actor Leo G. Carroll, who essentially reprised his role from *North by Northwest* as avuncular U.N.C.L.E. chief Alexander Waverly.

Given that *U.N.C.L.E.* was second only to 007 in the original spy-fi cycle, it's odd that this big-screen incarnation arrives well after lesser shows such as the eccentric spy western *Wild Wild West* and the *U.N.C.L.E.* parody *Get Smart* have had cinema remakes. An *U.N.C.L.E.* film has been in development for a decade or more,



It's all relative: Henry Cavill, Armie Hammer

with creatives including Quentin Tarantino and Steven Soderbergh attached at various points and sundry stars pencilled in to replace Vaughn and McCallum as Napoleon and Illya – last seen in the reunion TV movie *Return of the Man from U.N.C.L.E.: The Fifteen Years Later Affair* (1983). In the event, it's fallen to Guy Ritchie, fresh off a brace of revisionist Sherlock Holmes films, to handle the property – to which he brings his interest in feuding friendships (Napoleon and Illya, steadfast partners in the original, here spend more time fighting each other than the enemy), complicated plots involving misunderstandings and betrayals) and the trappings of high style and luxury (Napoleon and Illya argue over which fashions Alicia Vikander's Gaby should wear).

With its predominantly Roman settings, the film brings to mind the glut of Italian superspy knock-offs that emerged from the mid-1960s – the genre's most daffy exercise in opportunism was probably Alberto De Martino's *Operation Kid Brother* (1967), which cast Neil Connery as an agent we're supposed to take for James Bond's brother. The period costumes, vehicles and style are perfect – and there's a terrific score from Daniel Pemberton that honours Jerry Goldsmith's original theme with unusual instrument choices (flute, marimba). But the script keeps tripping over wrong-for-the-era expressions ("You'll take it like a pussy", "gazillionaire", "skill-set", "computer disc"), and the plot is still a variation on the 'Kreplachistan nuclear warhead' gambit parodied in *Austin Powers: International Man of Mystery* (1997). After a pretty good all-terrain-vehicle chase, it's a comedown that the climax depends on the hero keeping the villain talking on the phone so that someone else can blow her out of the water with a missile.

In a mini-aping of *Skyfall*, Henry Cavill's Solo and Armie Hammer's Kuryakin are given backstories (a spell as an art thief, a disgraced father in Siberia) and new character traits (sleight of hand, berserker rages) they don't really need. Making this an origin story also means that many of the best-remembered elements of the series – including the triangular badges, the covert HQ behind a New York tailor's shop, the gadgets (a pen-phone), the catchphrases ("Open Channel D") and arch-enemies THRUSH – don't get a look-in, as if saved for sequels. The leads are fine if bland, but Vikander and Hugh Grant (with very little to go on as Waverly) steal the film, as if the real plan was to ditch the guys and move straight to a *Girl from U.N.C.L.E.* movie. ☹

Marc Quinn Making Waves

United Kingdom 2014

Director: Gerry Fox

Certificate 15 85m 21s

Reviewed by John Beagles

In its own unsuspecting way, Gerry Fox's documentary about the artist Marc Quinn may be the most important film about the 21st-century art world yet made. For future cultural anthropologists and art historians, it may even come to be a seminal artefact, a latter-day Rosetta Stone.

In the film, Quinn, a former lieutenant in the YBA army who gained notoriety for his self-portrait *Self*, made from 4.5 litres of his own blood (the ultimate self-portrait, as he terms it), and his gold sculpture of Kate Moss, is followed fly-on-the-wall style around the globe for a year by Fox and his handheld camera. Quinn, never without trademark baseball cap and scarf, is possessed of a wide-eyed faux naivety and a permanently fixed benign smile.

As it transpires – and the film is eager to detail this for us – Quinn has much to smile about. The narrative of the film, such as it is, tracks the itinerant artist and his wife Lady Georgia Byng as they glide from Venice to New York, Hong Kong to Miami, Istanbul to London, Beijing to... Usually, Quinn's tours are for the purpose of supervising the installation of spectacular works, such as his 60ft-high inflatable version of his sculpture of the pregnant artist Alison Lapper.

If Quinn's Bond-like movements don't convince you of his A-list art-world status, the roll call of his friends and patrons will. The film includes an amusingly revealing series of lo-fi, slightly off-guard celeb moments: hey, it's Elton John in Venice, looking a bit hungover; Kim Kardashian, Kanye West and Lionel Richie at a party thrown by Tommy Hilfinger for Quinn in Miami; the Queen at the Chelsea Flower show... Brushing shoulders with these A-listers and royals is the predictable cavalcade of international gallerists, collectors, dealers and fellow artists (Ai Weiwei, Jay Jopling, Francesco Clemente) – an interminable, exhausting sample of the art world's rich and powerful air-kissing and avoiding saying absolutely anything of interest.

When he isn't partying like it's 1995, Quinn is seen interacting with the ordinary people who labour to fabricate his work and act as his muse. We witness technicians using state-of-the-art kit to scan bonsai trees, conch shells and body artist Laurence Sessou, to be 3D-printed or cast at exorbitant cost in luxury materials. As director of operations, Quinn is clearly



In like Quinn: Marc Quinn, Lorraine Sessou

Credits and Synopsis

Produced by

John Davis
Lionel Wigram
Guy Ritchie

Producer

Steve Clark-Hall

Screenplay

Guy Ritchie
Lionel Wigram

Story

Jeff Kleeman
David Campbell
Wilson
Guy Ritchie
Lionel Wigram
Based on the television series

Director of Photography

John Mathieson

Edited by

James Herbert

Production Designer

Oliver Scholl

Music

Daniel Pemberton

Production Sound Mixer

Gareth John

Costume Designer

Joanna Johnston

Stunt Co-ordinator

Jimmy O'Dee

Fight Co-ordinator

Mike Lambert

Production Companies

Warner Bros.
Pictures presents in association with Ratpac-Dune Entertainment a Ritchie/Wigram production
A Davis Entertainment production
A Guy Ritchie film

Producers

David Dobkin
Steven Mnuchin

Cast

Armie Hammer

Illya Kuryakin

Henry Cavill

Napoleon Solo

Alicia Vikander

Gabriella Teller,

'Gaby'

Elizabeth Debicki

Victoria Vinciguerra

Sylvester Groth

Uncle Rudi

Christian Berkel

Doctor Udo Teller

Luca Calvani

Alexander

Vinciguerra

Misha Kuznetsov

Oleg

Jared Harris

Sanders

Hugh Grant

Alexander Waverly

Dolby Atmos

In Colour

[2.35:1]

Part-subtitled

Distributor

Warner Bros.

Pictures

International (UK)

The early 1960s. CIA agent Napoleon Solo thwarts KGB agent Illya Kuryakin and extracts Gaby Teller, daughter of a missing scientist, from East Berlin. Napoleon and Illya become unwilling partners when Gaby infiltrates a fascist group led by Italian industrialist Victoria Vinciguerra, who is forcing Gaby's father to manufacture a nuclear weapon for the black market. Gaby betrays Napoleon and Illya to convince Victoria to let her get close to her father, but in fact she is working for Alexander Waverly of British Naval Intelligence. When Gaby's cover is blown and her father killed, Napoleon and Illya intervene to rescue her. Victoria escapes but her yacht is blown up by the US Navy. Waverly, Napoleon, Illya and Gaby team up in a new multinational group, the United Network Command for Law and Enforcement.



The Archaeology of Art

← proud of his hands-off managerial role. One suspects it's because he thinks it puts him in the same league as Warhol and Jeff Koons, culturepreneurs who operate in a similar fashion.

Strangely, very few secondary, independent voices (art critics or writers) ever appear on screen to discuss what fuels Quinn's reputation and popularity, or why anything he does is interesting beyond its formal, technically cutting-edge wow factor. There is, however, one person who is vocal about Quinn's work: Quinn himself. Unfortunately, the expositions he offers are somewhat forgettable descriptive explanations of his working processes. Nevertheless, friends extol him as the "greatest living artist". The mystery as to why renders Quinn akin to *Being There's* Chauncey the gardener – a man whose similarly simple platitudes are mistaken for signs of genius.

Whatever the truth, you can't help thinking that Quinn's affable demeanour, rather like Boris Johnson's, hides a rather more calculating interior. However, what is clear from watching *Making Waves* is that it is really only his centrality within an expanding network of rich, powerful and glamorous friends that defines, legitimises and sustains the mighty Quinn. As such it's a powerful testimony to, and oddly naked exposition of, the self-sustaining, hermetic, bubble-headed system of celebrity and millionaire patronage that now rules a stratum of the art world. Of course, if you aren't swayed by the power of Quinn's celebrity 'endorsements', it's a perverse Emperor's New Clothes experience of profound decadence and emptiness. ☹

Credits and Synopsis

Produced by
Gerry Fox
Filmed by
Gerry Fox
Editor
John Street
Sound Post Production

Peter Hodges

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Production Companies
A Foxy Films production
A film by Gerry Fox

In Colour
[1.78:1]

Distributor
Starline Entertainment

Documentary-maker Gerry Fox follows British artist Marc Quinn over the course of a year as he travels to New York, Miami, Venice, Istanbul and Beijing, installing new work, attending exhibition openings, meeting with collectors, dealers, fellow artists and celebrity fans and liaising with the artisans who manufacture his work.

The Messenger

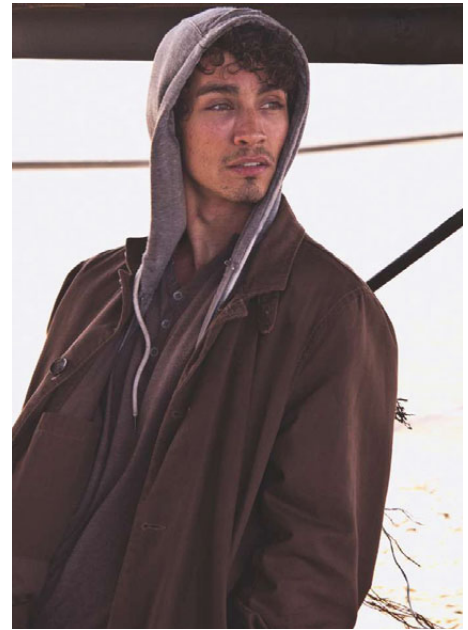
United Kingdom 2015
Director: David Blair
Certificate 15 100m 47s

Reviewed by Anton Bitel

"I see dead people," disturbed nine-year-old Cole (Haley Joel Osment) reveals to his child psychologist in M. Night Shyamalan's *The Sixth Sense* (1999), before being encouraged to embrace his special talent and make tentative approaches to the departed. "I may see dead people but then, by God, I do something about it!" declares the eponymous hero (Anton Yelchin) of *Odd Thomas* (2013), who is like a grown-up Cole, perkily confident in his supernatural abilities and proactive in resolving the unfinished business of the dead.

Then there is *The Messenger's* muttering, manic Jack (Robert Sheehan), who shares Cole and Odd's ability to see the dead but just wishes these persistent spirits would leave him alone, and only helps them to be rid of them. "They never go away!" he complains to his sceptical psychiatrist (Joely Richardson) – although she, until the film's third act, is a disembodied presence, no more visible to those around him than the ghostly uninvited guests who seek his intermediary services. Jack's dialogues with her take place as we see him walking and talking furiously in liminal spaces (estuaries, clifftops, grassy windswept coastlines), alienated in wide shot and utterly alone. She is clearly a voice of reason that Jack has learnt to internalise over many sessions. Meanwhile, the recently dead – such as murdered journalist Mark (Jack Fox) – also regularly converse with him, insisting that he pass on final messages to their loved ones. There is nothing ghostly about their banal, FX-free appearance, but only Jack, off his meds, sees and hears them – and this wide-eyed, messy individual's interventions with the living tend not to end well.

Director David Blair is known for the drama *Best Laid Plans* (2012) and for his extensive television work. *The Messenger* explores similar themes – only in a less comic mode – to his earlier feature *Mystics* (2003), which followed a pair of old con artists claiming to have a direct line to the dead. Jack's attempts to get closer to Mark's grieving widow Sarah (Tamzin Merchant) are



Ghost protocol: Robert Sheehan

intercut with flashbacks to his own traumatic, loss-filled childhood, and with scenes of his awkward reunion with estranged older sister Emma (Lily Cole), her upwardly mobile lawyer husband Martin (Alex Wyndham) and their young son Billy (Alfie Pettit-Page) – who seems to share Jack's affliction. The result is a clash of perspectives, as Jack's visionary way of construing the world around him comes up against the different views of psychiatry and the constabulary, all competing to locate (or conceal) an ambiguous truth. Meanwhile the past, as so often in tales of ghosts (or mental illness), is repeatedly projected on to the present.

Beautifully shot and disorientatingly edited, *The Messenger* finally leaves viewers to decide for themselves whether they have just witnessed an English reimagining of *The Sixth Sense* or of *The Voices* (2015). Either way, it is a haunting affair. ☹

Credits and Synopsis

Produced by
Richard Turner
Richard Hart
Mike Knowles
Written by
Andrew Kirk
Director of Photography
Ian Moss
Edited by
Ulrike Münch

Production Designer
John Ellis
Music
Ian Livingstone
Sound Recordist
Ken Campbell
Costume Designer
Georgina Napier

©Flare Film
(Messenger) Limited

Production Companies
Gateway Films &
Ratio Film present
Executive Producers
Chris Howard
Robert Anderson
David Martin
Mike Diamond
Tony Jimenez
Nick Napier-Bell
Duncan Napier-Bell

Cast
Robert Sheehan
Jack
Lily Cole
Emma
Tamzin Merchant
Sarah
Jack Fox
Mark
Alex Wyndham
Martin

Andrew Tiernan
Dad
Deirdre O'Kane
Mum
DCI Keane
DCI Keane
Joely Richardson
psychiatrist
Alfie Pettit-Page
Billy

In Colour
[2.35:1]
Distributor
Metrodome
Distribution Ltd

An English coastal town, the present. Drifter Jack sees the dead, and reluctantly helps them to communicate with the living. Murdered journalist Mark asks Jack to send a goodbye message to his grieving widow Sarah. Observing her, Jack realises that she is pregnant. Jack reunites with his estranged sister Emma, whose husband Martin is acting as Sarah's lawyer. Their young son Billy reveals to Jack that he too sees the ghost of a drowned boy. Jack visits Sarah and tells her of Mark's awareness that she is pregnant, only for a distraught Sarah, after calling the police, to divulge that the baby is not in fact Mark's. Jack is arrested, and after being seen raving violently (at the invisible Mark) in the holding cell, he is

institutionalised. His psychiatrist reveals to Martin that, ever since Jack as a boy found the body of his father, who had committed suicide, his sense of guilt and loss has driven him to create multiple personalities (imagined by him as ghosts) through which he maintains the fantasy of helping other bereaved people, ultimately in the hope of seeing his father's ghost again. Warned by Mark, Jack insists that Sarah must be saved from a suicide attempt – and indeed policeman Keane finds Sarah near to death from a suicide attempt in her apartment. He also finds, and covers up, Mark's recorded Skype message about a state conspiracy. Jack remains in a psychiatric hospital. The drowned boy visits Billy.

Mia madre

Italy/France/Germany 2015
Director: Nanni Moretti
Certificate 15 106m 54s

See Feature
on page 46

Reviewed by Philip Kemp

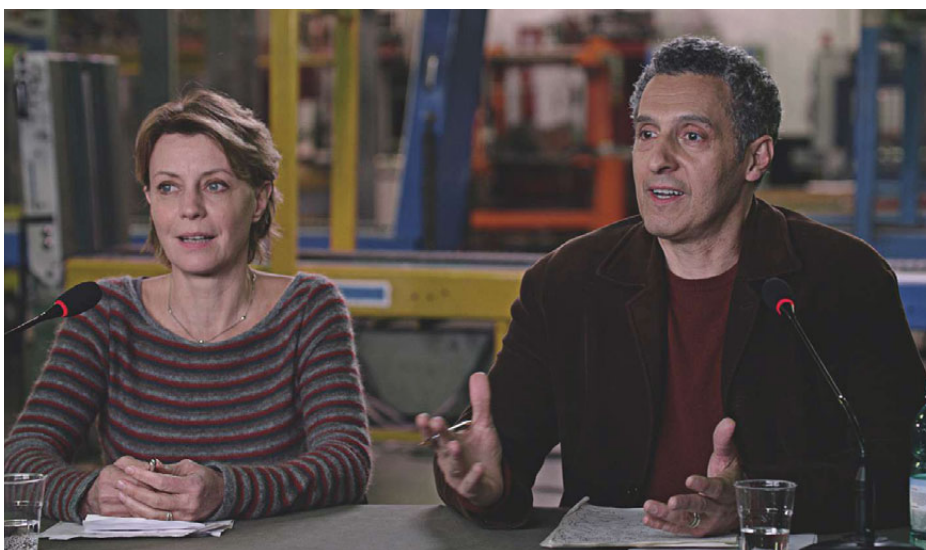
Nanni Moretti has dealt movingly before with family bereavement, in *The Son's Room* (2001). But there the death was that of a cherished teenage son who dies unexpectedly in a scuba-diving accident, shattering his family. This time the death is far from unpredictable: that of the elderly ailing mother of the protagonist Margherita, a film director played by Margherita Buy. Yet for all that it's expected – right from the start of the film we can guess that Ada (Giulia Lazzarini) will be dead by the end of it – it's no less moving, not least because of the strong autobiographical element. Moretti's mother, to whom he was much attached, died while was shooting his previous film, *We Have a Pope* (2011).

That film was deplored in some quarters for what was seen as Moretti's indulgent treatment of the papacy and the Catholic hierarchy, in contrast to the highly critical view of the Italian establishment he took in much of his earlier work (*Aprile*, *The Caiman*). In *Mia madre* he seems to be lampooning this view of himself as a consistently leftwing gadfly when Margherita faces a press conference about her film in progress, a strongly pro-labour account of a sit-in at a factory where the workforce is threatened by layoffs. "Today's audiences," she starts to pontificate, "ask us for a different commitment, films which are not just entertainment, but which affect our reality. That's why the task of cinema is to give voice..." "Yes, sure, the task of cinema," her inner voice takes over. "Why have I been saying the same thing for years? Everyone thinks I can understand what's happening, interpret reality, but I don't understand a thing any more."

If we can take Margherita as Moretti's surrogate (her advice to actors to "be next to the character" is apparently one of his regular instructions), he doesn't cut her much slack. She's shown as peremptory, hypocritical of her actors and crew, often tactlessly vocal in her dissatisfaction, while offering little in the way of praise beyond a perfunctory "Good, good." Not that she's easy on herself either. "Why did you listen to me?" she yells at her crew after one screw-up. "The director's an asshole and you let her get away with it!" It must be admitted, too, that what we see of her film isn't indicative of any great cinematic experience; it looks worthy but dull, lacking in humour – which could scarcely be said of any of Moretti's movies.

That latter ingredient, in *Mia madre*, is amply supplied by John Turturro, giving a gloriously ripe caricature of the kind of up-his-own-ass Hollywood actor with his career on the skids who resents being given direction and boasts of his supposed association with Kubrick ("Stanley was crazy about me!"). The scene where he and Margherita finally lose it and trade insults on the set offers good absurdist fun ("Take me back to reality!" howls Turturro); but almost immediately afterwards Margherita, her life sliding out of control, hits her lowest point, and finds herself screaming no less violently at her dying mother.

For, aside from the moviemaking insider jokes, this essentially pairs with *The Son's Room* as a film about family, constantly focusing back on Margherita's relationship with her brother



New direction: Margherita Buy, John Turturro

Giovanni (played by Moretti himself), with her sweet-natured daughter Livia, her estranged husband Federico and, always and crucially, her dying mother. Into this mother-daughter nexus, close but fraught, Moretti folds several sequences whose exact nature is ambiguous: dreams, memories, anxieties, nightmares? We see Margherita patrolling the length of an enormous queue for one of her previous movies (wish fulfilment?); in the queue are her mother and her own younger self. At another juncture she encounters her mother trying to drive, even though Margherita claims her licence has expired: she tears up the licence, grabs the wheel

and repeatedly rams the car into a wall. Another recurring sequence (seemingly shared by both Margherita and Giovanni), shows Ada wandering unimpeded out of the hospital and across a busy street wearing her hospital shift. Up to us to decide which if any of these represent reality.

For all his often disenchanted outlook, Moretti's films almost always end on a positive note (however hard won). *Mia madre* is no exception, as Ada's ex-pupils (she taught Latin, and evidently loved her job) come to pay warm posthumous tribute to her as a teacher and a person. No surprise that the film earned an eight-minute standing ovation at Cannes.

Credits and Synopsis

Produced by
Nanni Moretti
Domenico Proccoli
Screenplay
Nanni Moretti
Francesco Piccolo
Valia Santella
Story
Gaia Manzini
Nanni Moretti
Valia Santella
Chiara Valerio
Director of Photography
Aldo Catani
Editing
Clelio Benevento
Art Direction
Paola Bizzarri
Sound Recordist

Alessandro Zanon
Costumes
Valentina Taviani

@Sacher Film,
Fandango, Le Pacte,
ARTE France Cinéma
Production Companies
Nanni Moretti,
Domenico Proccoli
and Rai Cinema
present
A film by Nanni
Moretti
A co-production of
Sacher Film and
Fandango with
Rai Cinema,
Le Pacte, ARTE

France Cinéma
With the participation
of Canal+, Cine+,
ARTE/WDR,
Films Boutique
In association with
Films Distribution,
Cinéma 8, Cofinova
10, Indefilms 2,
Soficinema 10,
Palatine Etoile 11,
B Media 2012 and
Backup Media
Made with the
contribution of
Eurimages - Council
of Europe
With the participation
of Aide aux cinémas
du Monde - CNC,

Ministère des
Affaires étrangères
et du Développement
international,
Institut Français
In association with
IFITALIA -
International Factors
Italia S.p.A., Feltrinelli
Made with the
support of Regione
Lazio - Fondo
regionale per il
cinema e l'audiovisivo
Recognized film of
cultural interest by
Ministero per i beni
e le attività culturali
Direzione Generale
per il Cinema

Cast
Margherita Buy
Margherita
John Turturro
Barry Huggins
Giulia Lazzarini
Ada
Nanni Moretti
Giovanni
Beatrice Mancini
Livia
Stefano Abbati
Federico
Francesco Acquaroli
camera operator
Anna Bellato
actress
Lorenzo Gioielli
interpreter
Enrico Ianniello

Vittorio
Tony Laudadio
producer
Tatiana Lepore
script supervisor
Pietro Ragusa
Bruno
Monica Samassa
doctor
Vanessa Scalera
nurse
Renato Scarpa
Luciano

In Colour
[1.85:1]
Subtitles

Distributor
Curzon Film World

Present-day Rome. Margherita, a film director in her fifties, has just started shooting her latest production, about a sit-in at a factory threatened with layoffs following a takeover by an American company. She's distracted by thoughts of her mother Ada, a former Latin teacher who is seriously ill in hospital. Margherita's brother Giovanni helps her care for Ada. Her teenage daughter Livia returns from a skiing holiday with her father Federico (from whom Margherita is separated) and is distressed to see how ill her grandmother is.

Margherita picks up Barry Huggins, the American star of her film, at the airport. The next evening the producer takes Margherita and Barry out to celebrate the actor's arrival; Barry becomes increasingly drunk, boasting how he worked with

Stanley Kubrick. On set he proves temperamental and awkward; he has trouble remembering his lines and refuses to take direction. Ada's condition deteriorates and she's taken into intensive care. Margherita wakes to find her flat flooded with water; she and Livia move into her mother's apartment. Giovanni takes leave of absence from his job.

Rather reluctantly, Margherita and Federico buy Livia a scooter. On set, Margherita rows with Barry. She and Giovanni, realising that the end is near for Ada, agree to take their mother home, where she helps Livia with her Latin homework. Margherita makes her peace with Barry and the film is completed. Ada dies. Some of her former pupils come to pay their respects, recalling what an inspiring and supportive teacher she was.

Misery Loves Comedy

USA 2014
Director: Kevin Pollak

Reviewed by Sam Davies

Among the biggest clichés in comedy is the notion of the tears of the clown – the idea that off stage, away from the spotlight and the validation of the crowd, most comics are depressed, dysfunctional wrecks who use drugs and alcohol as crutches to hobble through to their next show. It's not a complete myth: aside from comedy's many high-profile casualties (Lenny Bruce, Richard Pryor, Jim Belushi), it's telling that the Laugh Factory, one of Los Angeles's biggest comedy clubs, has an in-house therapy programme for its performers. *Misery Loves Comedy* is American comic Kevin Pollak's attempt to test this connection by speaking to more than 50 of his fellow comics.

It's hard to knock Pollak's survey sample either for quality or quantity. He's got access to big names (Tom Hanks, Larry David, Judd Apatow, Jon Favreau, Christopher Guest) and so many contributors to fit into 90 minutes that many appear for little more than a one-liner. Favreau recalls writing his breakthrough feature *Swingers* (1996) after a traumatic break-up, and remembers the cathartic effect once the film had come out and connected with its audience. Freddie Prinze Jr talks publicly for the first time about his father – a rising comedian who shot himself in front of his manager in 1977. Asked if she thinks comedians are generally unhappy, Amy Schumer says that in her experience they are, but that personally, she "usually feels... [long pause] indifferent". The pause feels telling.

Just as many of Pollak's subjects reject the connection. Kathleen Madigan, recalling her time spent working behind a bar, insists that the general public are a pretty miserable bunch (a comment that will ring true to anyone who's done similar work). Penn Jillette argues that correlation is not causation, and that comics are no more likely to suffer from depression than the general population – it's just that they make use of it as material. "It's SHOW business," he yells in caps and probably bold too, "they're going to SHOW you!"

Pollak leaves many wider questions alone, such as the much debated link between depression and creativity in general and the degree to which, comedians' mental health aside, many kinds of comedy rely on cruelty or the misfortune of



Laughing gas: Amy Schumer

others (see slapstick). But then, he leaves his central framing question alone altogether for much of *Misery Loves Comedy*. With his collected interview material organised loosely into brief thematic sections, it's not until roughly 70 minutes of the film have passed that Pollak really starts to press the point with his subjects. Before then his questions revolve around being a comic generally. There's much reminiscing about when people realised they were comics ("I didn't tell a joke until I was 21," deadpans Jemaine Clement) or how they learnt to tweak the mechanics of a routine and manipulate the audience. Apatow describes how he spent his adolescence in the 1980s chasing down major comedy figures and tape-recording interviews with them – effectively serving a long comedy apprenticeship. But it's not always clear why Pollak finds space for some of the diversions here. Australian comic Jim Jefferies rambles about the dilemma of growing up hating rich kids and, having made some money, wanting to prevent his own child being one: you have the distinct impression he's testing out a possible routine.

Misery Loves Comedy is essentially a close relative of *Something from Nothing: The Art of Rap* (2012), in which with no particular thesis but to very entertaining effect Ice-T interviews various rappers about rap and rapping. When Jimmy Fallon describes the joys of talking shop with fellow comedians – swapping road stories and tales of sketchy booking agents and friends or enemies bombing horribly – he's all but describing what *Misery Loves Comedy* does. Could Pollak have pushed his line of questioning harder? Perhaps – but as the closing dedication to Robin Williams reminds us, comedy can as often be used to deflect, diffuse and distract as to tell the truth about a comic's inner life. **S**

Mission: Impossible Rogue Nation

USA/People's Republic of China 2015,
Director: Christopher McQuarrie, Certificate 12A 131m 26s

Reviewed by Tim Hayes

The not-so-subtext of the original *Mission: Impossible* TV series was a reassuring Nixonian bedtime story – that whatever appalling behaviour your government's peace officers might be up to in, say, Kent State or South-East Asia, its covert IMF operatives were beaver away efficiently on ops not so much black as subterranean, fighting the good fight in countries often called the Eastern European People's Republic. But right from its initial husbandry in the hands of a leftist filmmaker like Brian De Palma, the *M:I* movie franchise was never likely to have much truck with all that. Ethan Hunt's missions have repeatedly been bedevilled by the treacherous within his own malfunctioning management, before being dragged over the finish line by ground-level grunt work. "The only thing that functioned properly on the mission was this team," sighed Hunt at the end of 2011's flimsy *Ghost Protocol*, brushing the dust of collateral damage off his trousers.

Rogue Nation takes a more outward-looking worldview than that, along with what in *M:I* terms at least sounds like a political discussion of cause and effect. The Syndicate, casually mentioned in passing at the end of the last film, turns out to be a daunting force for universal chaos, pushing the entire world towards havoc just for the hell of it – "a terrorist superpower", murmurs Ving Rhames's ever-pragmatic Luther Stickell. It's a phrase laden with current political anxieties, while also describing THRUSH in *The Man from U.N.C.L.E.*

This course correction comes from director Christopher McQuarrie, whose instinctively muscular style both here and in *Jack Reacher* (2012) still feels at this point like a welcome interloper, worming its way back into the smoothly polished Apple Store of mainstream franchise engineering after many years on the outs. The core of McQuarrie's film isn't the usual heroic fallibility so much as destiny, manifest or otherwise. *Rogue Nation* gradually includes more and more talk – not always very coherent – of predestination, of fate. "You were certain we would end up where we are right now," Hunt tells his adversary, adding, "Then again, so was I." Alec Baldwin's CIA director calls Hunt the physical manifestation of destiny itself, while keeping a vaguely straight face.

Obsessive readers of the small print can also now observe a splicing of McQuarrie's brawn with the practised finesse of producer J.J. Abrams, who directed and co-wrote 2006's *M:I:III* (2006). McQuarrie nods directly at Abrams's film early on, with the appearance of an actual rabbit's-foot keyring referencing that movie's macguffin, and his best elements combine the different affinities of both filmmakers. It's not quite a perfect mix: when Rebecca Ferguson's double agent, rejoicing in the spring-loaded name of Ilsa Faust, strikes a leggy pose in the line of duty, McQuarrie doesn't engineer it with the grace that Abrams extended to Maggie Q doing the same thing in *III*. On the other hand, McQuarrie's regular composer Joe Kraemer gives Faust a musical motif borrowed from *Turandot* as soon as she arrives, long before the Puccini opera and its own unattainable princess crop

Credits and Synopsis

Produced by

Becky Newhall
Burton Ritchie
Barry Katz

Written by

John Vorhaus

Kevin Pollak

Director of Photography

Adam McDaid

Edited by

Rob Legato

Kevin Pollak

Dylan King

Sound Mixers

Brett Brooke

David Hocs

Kahung Chu

Beau Gourley

©Magnanimos Films

Executive Producers

Ben Galecki

Ashton Newhall

Liz Davidson

Jess Ravich

In Colour

[1.78:1]

Distributor

Kaleidoscope
Entertainment

A documentary in which American comedian Kevin Pollak interviews more than 50 of his peers – stand-ups, comedy writers, actors, directors and podcasters – in an attempt to settle the question of whether you need to be personally miserable to produce comedy.



Vogue's gallery: Rebecca Ferguson, Tom Cruise

up in the plot itself – a choice that you imagine appealed to director and producer alike.

Opponents worthy of a man of destiny are likely to be in short supply. Solomon Lane (Sean Harris) is too shadowy to support the descriptions we hear, which are hyperbolic enough for Lex Luthor, although he does join the intriguing list of screen villains deliberately costumed to bring Steve Jobs to mind. Comic relief on the other hand is everywhere, an aspect of franchise engineering where McQuarrie seems to have gone with the flow. Nothing in *Rogue Nation* feels as abject as the bit in *Ghost Protocol* when Tom Cruise and Simon Pegg disguised themselves as a corridor, but the jokes are still a drag. If Cruise's Bondian pre-credits misadventures on the side

of an actual plane are an upgrade from the days when Roger Moore's stunt man used to fall out of one in a secure wig, Pegg's humorous gadget-man grappling with Russian-language defence hardware is still the same gag as Chevy Chase hitting it with a rock in *Spies Like Us* (1985). And the routine was thick with dust even then.

Generally, however, McQuarrie prefers his humour drier than that, with hints of masculine mortality, which in turn means a political dimension, a sardonic weakening of the whole patrician palaver. Countless screaming civilians aside, the worst accusation anyone in the film can think to hurl at the Syndicate is the idea the group wants to smash the rotten system that created it. Imagine. 

Credits and Synopsis

Produced by

Tom Cruise
J.J. Abrams
Bryan Burk
David Ellison
Dana Goldberg
Don Granger
Screenplay
Christopher McQuarrie
Story
Christopher McQuarrie
Drew Pearce
Based on the television series

created by

Bruce Geller
Director of Photography
Robert Elswit
Edited by
Eddie Hamilton
Production Designer
Jim Bissell
Music
Joe Kraemer
Theme Created by
Lalo Schiffrin
Supervising Sound Editor
James Mather

Costume Designer

Joanna Johnston
Stunt Co-ordinator
Wade Eastwood

©Paramount Pictures Corporation
Production Companies
Paramount Pictures and Skydance Productions present an Odin Production
A Bad Robot production
In association

with China Movie Channel, Alibaba Pictures, China Movie Media Group
Executive Producer
Jake Myers

Cast

Tom Cruise
Ethan M. Hunt
Jeremy Renner
William Brandt
Simon Pegg
Benjamin Dunn, 'Benji'
Rebecca Ferguson

Ilsa Faust
Ving Rhames
Luther Stickell
Sean Harris
Solomon Lane
Simon McBurney
Atlee, M16 chief
Zhang Jingchu
Lauren, CIA agent
Tom Hollander
British Prime Minister
Jens Hultén
Janik Vinter, 'the Bone Doctor'
Alec Baldwin
Alan Hunley,

CIA director

Dolby Atmos In Colour
[2.35:1]
Part-subtitled

Distributor
Paramount Pictures UK

Belarus, present day. IMF agent Ethan Hunt and his team successfully retrieve stolen nerve gas from a transport plane. However, Hunt is subsequently captured by Solomon Lane, an agent of a shadowy terrorist force called the Syndicate. CIA chief Hunley, doubtful of the Syndicate's existence and assuming that Hunt has gone on the run, has the IMF shut down. Hunt escapes captivity with the covert aid of Ilsa Faust, apparently a British double agent, and sets about tracking down Lane. After failing to prevent the assassination of the Austrian chancellor, Hunt follows

clues left by Faust to Morocco, where he retrieves a file thought to contain details of Syndicate membership. Faust in turn steals the file from Hunt and attempts to pass it to her British spymaster Atlee, but he forces her to return to Lane instead, as part of a scheme to eliminate Hunt. The file in fact contains details of Syndicate finances and reveals that the group was originally Atlee's creation, an off-the-books adjunct to British intelligence that has now gone rogue. Hunt defeats Atlee and Lane but allows Faust to leave. The IMF is reconstituted, with Hunt's ally Brandt in charge.

99 Homes

Director: Ramin Bahrani

Reviewed by Trevor Johnston

In the past decade, Iranian-American writer-director Ramin Bahrani has built up a distinctive, admired filmography examining the hardships of those on the margins of US society. In films about a Pakistani coffee-stall owner (*Man Push Cart*, 2005), a Hispanic auto-parts hustler (*Chop Shop*, 2007) and a Senegalese cabbie (*Goodbye Solo*, 2008), he initially specialised in the travails of ethnic minorities, but as his budgets and commercial ambitions have expanded, he's recently cast name actors (Dennis Quaid's seed farmer in *At Any Price*, 2012) while keeping his stories focused on the specifics of the workplace.

Now, in his closest foray into the centre of American experience, he tackles the subprime mortgage crisis through the experiences of an evicted family and the realtor making a fortune out of foreclosure. The associated building slowdown has left Andrew Garfield's roofer Dennis Nash so broke that he's lost the family home, and his desperation leads him to swallow his pride and work for Michael Shannon's never-busier broker Rick Carver, who's flourishing by repossessing and selling on hundreds of properties. Flung together by circumstance, their relationship is a slightly contrived but undeniably effective device encapsulating the bitter truth that one man's financial disaster is another man's opportunity.

As always, Bahrani's skill is to make us feel we're getting absolutely authentic access to these lives, and for British viewers this immersion in the particularities of the US property market will be a revelation, not least the involvement of huge government-backed mortgage brokers who, because of their sheer size, are vulnerable to wheeler-dealer Carver's chicanery on the ground. (He augments his own cut by stealing air-conditioning units from repossessed properties and then billing the lenders way over the odds to replace them.) Barking out orders with a zeal recalling primetime Tommy Lee Jones, Shannon is outstanding. His performance succeeds precisely because he never treats Carver as a monster, instead portraying him as a classic American entrepreneur – "Don't get too sentimental about property" is his mantra – taking advantage of a situation created by a toxic combination of overstretched borrowers and foolhardy lenders. Opposite him, Garfield brings



House hunter: Andrew Garfield, Michael Shannon

← a querulous specificity to his portrayal of an essentially decent man whose conscience won't quite let him enjoy the spoils of his new job, presenting an outwardly emotional but not desperately articulate protagonist who's thankfully not one for speechifying.

Indeed, giving Garfield a certain air of diffidence is definitely a wise decision by Bahrani, since the general trajectory of the plot from desperation and temptation to transgression and redemption is obvious enough already, and achieved with some legal sleight of hand that's rather too neat for the film's own good. Still, as with the work of Ken Loach and his writer Paul Laverty, it's forgivable in the context, since the overall picture is the sort of compelling, generous and highly relevant saga of ordinary lives that so few American filmmakers are tackling these days. If Bahrani has to make some minor compromises along the way, it's still worth taking the journey with him. 

Credits and Synopsis

Produced by Ashok Amritraj Ramin Bahrani Kevin Turen Justin Nappi	Production Companies Broad Green Pictures presents a Hyde Park Entertainment production in association with Image Nation An Ashok Amritraj production in association with Noruz Films and Treehouse Pictures A film by Ramin Bahrani	Laura Dern Lynn Tim Guinee Frank Green Noah Lomax Connor Cullen Moss Bill J.D. Evermore Mr Tanner Ciancy Brown
Screenplay Ramin Bahrani Amir Naderi	Executive Producer Manu Gargi Ron Curtis Arcadiy Golubovich Mohammed Al Turki	In Colour [2.35:1]
Story Ramin Bahrani Bahareh Azimi		Distributor Studiocanal Limited
Director of Photography Bobby Bukowski		
Editor Ramin Bahrani		
Production Designer Alex DiGerlando		
Music Antony Partos Matteo Zingales		
Sound Eliot Connors		
Costume Designer Meghan Kasperlik		
	Cast Andrew Garfield Dennis Nash Michael Shannon Rick Carver	

Orlando, Florida, 2010. Hard-up roofer Dennis Nash, his mother Lynn and son Connor are evicted from their home after falling behind on mortgage payments. The property is taken over by corrupt realtor Rick Carver, who represents the bank. After relocating to a seedy motel, Nash upbraids one of Carver's workers for stealing his tools, only for Carver to intervene, assigning Nash a sewage-clearing job that no one else will handle. Nash begins to make himself invaluable to Carver, learning the tricks of his trade and earning a sizeable income; however, his moral misgivings about being involved in the evictions of other families prevent him revealing his employer's identity to Lynn and Connor. Nash persuades Carver to let him buy back his old home, and takes his impressed mother and son for a visit before the deal is finalised. In the meantime, an irate evicted father arrives at the motel and blows Nash's cover. Nash moves Lynn and Connor into a larger property, but their faith in him is destroyed and they move out. Carver is on the verge of a big property deal but securing it requires Nash to lodge a forged document with the court, causing plucky homeowner Frank to lose his battle against repossession. Frank takes up a hunting rifle to resist eviction; Nash defuses the situation by revealing the forgery, saving his conscience but getting himself and Carver into trouble with the authorities.

Orion The Man Who Would Be King

United Kingdom 2015
Director: Jeanie Finlay

Reviewed by Sam Davies

In a sense, *Orion: The Man Who Would Be King* could just as easily have been subtitled 'A Legend Is Born'. A legion of urban myths can be traced back to the sublimely cynical sleight of hand that lies at the heart of its story. Sun Records artist Orion appeared soon after the death of Elvis Presley. He sang exactly like Elvis, styled his hair like Elvis, wore satin jumpsuits like Elvis. He looked like Elvis – possibly, although the mask he never removed in public, on stage or off, made it hard to be sure. OK, he was a good four inches taller than Elvis had been, but still he could be, couldn't he?

Orion was not Elvis following a *Seconds*-style escape and makeover. Orion's true identity was Jimmy Ellis, a would-be superstar who had discovered while growing up in 1950s Alabama that he could mimic Elvis's voice and vocal mannerisms to uncanny effect. He had already made repeated unsuccessful attempts at a singing career – including cutting the novelty single 'I'm Not Trying to Be Like Elvis', which presumably fooled only himself. But after Elvis's death in 1977, the head of Sun Records, Shelby Singleton, began to offer him work, singing uncredited over old sessions by Elvis collaborators such as Carl Perkins. Singleton released the results to mourning fans happy to believe they were the real deal. The Orion persona was a warped-logical progression, taking Ellis's voice and Elvis(h) appearance and applying a hokey backstory stolen wholesale from a proto-fanfic novel about an Elvis-like singer who fakes his own death to escape the burdens of stardom. Singleton's contract required Ellis to wear the mask in public at all times.

Director Jeanie Finlay's earlier documentary *The Great Hip Hop Hoax* (2013) told the story of two American rappers who secured lucrative recording contracts in London – only to have their credibility and career disappear when it was revealed they were actually from the hip-hop hotbed of Dundee. *Orion* mines similar themes – identity, ambition, authenticity, reinvention – to tell a similar pop-cultural parable. There's a truly hellish quality to the sight of Ellis, in his mid-thirties, signing up to this Faust-gone-Nashville pact – fame without recognition, success without acknowledgement.

Finlay's take on Ellis's bizarre story is cogent and sensitive throughout. It never quite transcends the sum of its parts, but then the material does present difficulties. Once Ellis has made the decision in 1983 to reclaim a morsel of integrity and ditch the Orion mask, his narrative hits the doldrums along with his career, locking into a Sisyphean round of damp-squib reinventions and relaunched, playing to diminishing crowds for diminishing returns. The closest *Orion* has to a comeback special is painful VHS footage of Ellis performing in a high-school auditorium to stony indifference. Finlay wisely holds back a couple of details about Ellis's early life and parentage for this largely flat final act. A friend claims that Ellis's birth certificate simply names a 'Vernon' as the father – which, coupled with his remarkable resemblance to Elvis's father Vernon Presley and the vocal similarities, raises the tantalising prospect that



Return to singer: Jimmy Ellis

this benighted Elvis-impersonator-in-denial may in fact have been the star's half-brother.

Another problem Finlay's film cannot work around is the quality of Ellis's music. Whereas Malik Bendjelloul's *Searching for Sugar Man* (2012) was buoyed up by its Rodriguez soundtrack, Orion's discs are 24-carat lead – hardly surprising given that Sun cranked out seven LPs in two years, dabbling in country, gospel and rockabilly. Presumably poor Ellis had a different mask for each genre. Singleton pops up once again as the pantomime villain, with Orion's recording sessions at the original Sun Studios being constantly interrupted by the arrival of the Elvis-worshipping tour groups he ran as a side-earner. His response to Ellis's complaint regarding one flawed recording: "Don't worry about it, you don't buy the fucking records." 

Credits and Synopsis

Producers Jeanie Finlay Dewi Gregory	association with Ffilm Cymru Wales, BBC Storyville and Broadway a Glimmer	Truth Department, Met Film
Written by Dewi Gregory	Films production in association with Met Film Production and Truth Department	Executive Producers Al Morrow Suzanne Alizart
Directors of Photography Stewart Copeland Mark Bushnell Steven Sheil	A film by Jeanie Finlay	Richard Holmes Christopher Moll Hannah Thomas Kate Townsend John Tobin
Editor Lucas Roche	Made with the support of Creative England's Production Fund	Andy Copping Alexander Preston
Re-recording Mixer Pip Norton	Supported by Film - The National Lottery through The Arts Council of Wales, BBC Storyville, Broadway, Glimmer,	In Colour [1.85:1]
©Success Takes Courage Limited		Distributor Glimmer Films
Production Companies Creative England presents in		

A documentary about Jimmy Ellis, who, following the death of Elvis Presley in 1977, had a brief musical career as mysterious masked singer 'Orion'. Ellis, whose singing voice was remarkably like Elvis's, was contractually obliged to remain masked in public, and was deliberately marketed to suggest the possibility that he was the surviving, incognito Elvis. Unable to sustain the charade after 1983, Ellis tried to launch a career under his own name, but with minimal success. In 1998 he was shot dead in an armed robbery.

Pixels

USA 2015
Director: Chris Columbus
Certificate 12A 105m 38s

Reviewed by Nick Pinkerton

Twenty years ago, *Billy Madison* cemented the status of *Saturday Night Live* alum Adam Sandler as the idiot comic of choice on campuses across the US. He starred as a feckless clown who has to go back to school to win his father's approval, showing along the way that he's stupider by half than the average fifth grader. In the two decades since, Sandler has had his all-too-typical 'take me seriously' projects – *Pixels* arrives hot on the heels of *The Cobbler* – but arrested-development-case comedy has been the well to which he could always return, most recently with box-office success in the ironically named *Grown Ups* diptych.

In *Pixels*, Sandler plays Sam Brenner, a 1980s videogame prodigy whose subsequent life hasn't delivered on its early promise, a loser whose useless, time-wasting skills will elevate him to unexpected heroism. Brenner's gift is for memorising the patterns in games, and *Pixels*, though credited as an adaptation of a 2010 short film by Patrick Jean, might very well have been developed through replicating the patterns of Sandler's past successes. There is *The Wedding Singer*'s 80s nostalgia, pop-culture cameos (Serena Williams and Martha Stewart standing in for Bob Barker and Gary Coleman), and the wish-fulfilment justification of adolescent Peter Pan-ism that's a through-line from *Billy Madison* to *That's My Boy*, Sandler's last actually funny live-action comedy.

The *Pixels* script is by Timothy Dowling and Tim Herlihy, Sandler's collaborator from the *SNL* days, though Chris Columbus has stepped in for Sandler's favourite house hacks, Frank Coraci and Dennis Dugan. The film begins, in a move copied from countless *SNL*-vet properties, by introducing the dramatis personae as little



Fact invader: *Pixels*

kids – here Brenner and his tubby best friend Will Cooper. Flash forward 30-odd years and Cooper has become the president of the United States, and is played by frequent Sandler crony Kevin James, a gifted husky physical comedian given practically nothing to do here except draw a pay cheque. The hilarious Jane Krakowski, as his First Lady, has even less to occupy herself with, though Josh Gad, playing yet another washed-up gamer, is given an agonising amount of screen time.

With its arena-rock soundtrack cues and smothering will to entertain, *Pixels* tries everything it can think of to goose the viewer into feeling something, and its desperation is almost touching. Attempting to appeal both to the undergraduates who quoted *The Waterboy* ad nauseam and who have mortgages now, and also to their kids, *Pixels* comes across as wildly inconsistent in tone, at once nasty-naughty and ingratiatingly cutesy. (Gad's character is a conspiracy nut, but PG-13 over-caution keeps the writers from doing much with this.) It sticks to the patterns, sure, but the "Game Over" in the closing credits feels like an epitaph. **C**

Pleasure Island

United Kingdom 2014
Director: Mike Doxford
Certificate 15 106m 48s

Reviewed by Hannah McGill

Archetypes thrive in an otherwise arid setting in this hardworking but ponderous seaside-set debut. The film's smalltime hoods are so nasty they should really have moustachios to twiddle; the sole female character exists in such a state of swooning distress she might as well be lashed to some train tracks; and the latter is rescued from the former by a do-gooding outsider with a mysterious past and a burden of guilt.

While the northern English setting and the sense of lives irredeemably circumscribed by poverty, misfortune and poor decisions recall the British New Wave, the didactic morality and unreconstructed machismo owe more to the American western, while the bloody one-on-one violence points to the vigilante genre. The sense of a provincial England in which only varying degrees of intoxication, sexual transgression and casual violence lift the locals from their utter apathy, meanwhile, is in keeping with a certain strain of recent British output, exemplified by the likes of *The Great Ecstasy of Thomas Carmichael* (2005), *Better Things* (2008), *Fish Tank* (2009) and *Blood Cells* (2014).

Certain ideas and sequences lend energy here: the relationship between returning soldier Dean (Ian Sharp) and his father Tony (Nicholas Day) is one of unsparing nastiness, the original source of which is never fully identified. Tony's scheme of using his racing pigeons to fly in drugs from Amsterdam is a nicely macabre corruption of a quaint working-class tradition; and a more obvious but still effective juxtaposition



Credits and Synopsis

Produced by

Adam Sandler
Chris Columbus
Mark Radcliffe
Allen Covert

Screenplay

Tim Herlihy
Timothy Dowling

Screen Story

Tim Herlihy
Based on the short film by Patrick Jean

Director of Photography

Amir Mokri
Edited by
Hughes Winborne

Production Designer

Peter Wenham

Music

Henry Jackman
Production Mixer
Glen Gauthier

Costume Designer

Christine Wada
Visual Effects
Digital Domain

Trixer

Storm Studios
Atomic Fiction
Pixel Playground

Special Visual Effects and Animation

Sony Pictures
Imageworks

Executive Producers

©Columbia Pictures

Industries, Inc., LSC
Film Corporation and
China Film Co., Ltd

Production Companies

Columbia Pictures
presents in
association with
L Star Capital and
China Film Co., Ltd a
Happy Madison/1492
Pictures production

In association with
Film Croppers
Entertainment

A Chris Columbus film
Executive Producers
Patrick Jean
Benjamin Darras

Johnny Alves

Matias Boucard
Seth Gordon
Ben Waisbren

La Peikang

Jack Giarraputo
Steve Koren
Heather Parry

Barry Bernardi

Michael Barnathan

Cast

Adam Sandler

Sam Brenner

Kevin James

President Will Cooper

Michelle Monaghan

Lt. Col. Violet

Van Patten

Peter Dinklage

Eddie Plant

Josh Gad

Ludlow Lamonsoff

Brian Cox

Admiral Porter

Sean Bean

Corporal Hill

Jane Krakowski

First Lady Jane
Cooper

Affion Crockett

Sergeant Dylan Cohan

Ashley Benson

Lady Lisa

Matt Lintz

Matty

Lainie Kazan

Mickey Lamonsoff

Dan Aykroyd

1982 championship
MC

Dolby Atmos

In Colour

[1.85:1]

Some screenings presented in 3D

Distributor

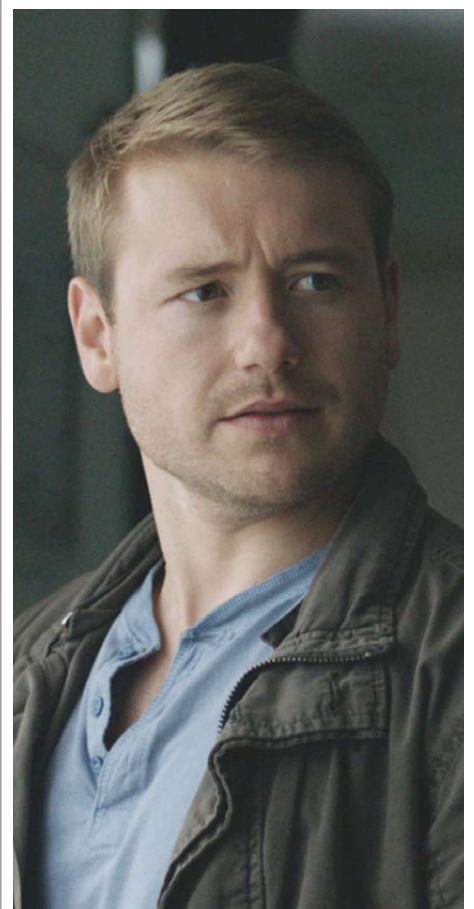
Sony Pictures

Releasing

US, 1982. Sam Brenner, a videogame prodigy, enters an arcade game championship at the urging of his best friend Will Cooper. He is defeated in the final round by loudmouthed champ Eddie Plant. Footage of the event is sent into outer space on a probe.

Three decades later, Brenner works for a home electronics store and Cooper is US president. When an American military base is attacked by what seems to be the videogame 'Galaga', President Cooper calls in Brenner to act as an adviser in consultation with crotchety Admiral Porter and Lieutenant Colonel Violet Van Patten, with whom he'd earlier had a flirtatious encounter in the course of his work. It transpires that footage from the 1982 arcade championship was

received by extraterrestrials and taken as a challenge; in order to save the world, Earth must defeat the invaders in live-action versions of the classic games. In London, Brenner and another gamer genius, Ludlow Lamonsoff, help to defeat 'Centipede'. In New York they vanquish 'Pac-Man', aided by Plant, who has been sprung from prison for the occasion. Plant uses cheat codes, which angers the invaders, who descend on Washington DC in their mothership and beam up Van Patten's son. Brenner, Cooper, Lamonsoff and Van Patten ascend into the mothership together and face off against Donkey Kong. Brenner learns that Plant cheated in the 1982 finals, and this gives him the boost of confidence he needs to topple Kong and save the world.



Pigeon fancier: Ian Sharp

occurs when affluent gangster Miles (Michael J. Jackson) does foulmouthed business on the phone from the heart of a grotesquely lavish children's birthday party, funded by his drug-dealing and pimping.

Less persuasive is the central relationship between the rather blank Ian and the woman he intends to save, Jess (Gina Bramhill), the widow of a friend he saw die in Afghanistan. It's never entirely clear why Jess is so utterly helpless; why she can't simply leave her part-time job as a pole dancer and find something to do that makes her cry less; and why there are apparently no police on this stretch of the Lincolnshire coast – except that the film needs Ian to champion a cause. And while it preoccupies itself with intense feelings, it can be tone-deaf when it comes to human behaviour. Jess's role as a parent, for instance, is vital to the logic of the plot but inadequately enacted: "I can't let anything happen to him," she says of her young son, and yet when a couple of heavies invade her home in search of Dean, she opts to stand weeping at the sidelines of the fight rather than find and protect the boy. It's this sort of oversight that makes these characters feel rather more puppet-like than the film crafted around them deserves. **S**

Credits and Synopsis

Produced by Rebecca Joerin-Sharp Ian Sharp Mike Duxford	Production Company Achilles Entertainments	Darwin Shaw Harper
Written by Mike Duxford Simon Richardson	Cast Ian Sharp Dean Gina Bramhill Jess Nicholas Day Tony Rick Warden Connor Michael J. Jackson Miles Samuel Anderson Nate Connor Chapman Sam Neil McCaul Brian Mackie Jack Rigby Baz Paul Bullion Russ	In Colour [1.85:1]
Story Ian Sharp Cinematography Sam Goldie Shaun Cobley Tom Wade Edited by Simon Richardson Production Design Ismini Xekalaki Original Music Simon Richardson Sound Design Nick Bridge-Butler Costume Designer Sallyann Short		Distributor Metrodome Distribution Ltd
©Achilles Entertainments		

Grimsby, the present. Soldier Dean returns to his hometown and is met with a chilly reception from his father Tony. He tracks down Jess, the widow of his friend Adam, whose death in Afghanistan he feels responsible for. Jess now supports their son by dancing at the Unicorn nightclub. Tony has been helping Miles, owner of the Unicorn, to smuggle drugs; Miles correctly suspects him of skimming. Miles's underling Connor sends Jess to entertain at a party hosted by a rich local businessman, but when the client tries to coerce her into sex, she flees. Connor comes to her house and throws her down the stairs. Dean visits Connor and offers to work for him in exchange for Jess's freedom. The first job he takes part in is the torture of his own father – but Dean turns on the hoods and saves Tony. He hides Jess at his friend Nate's house. He visits Miles, to return the small amount of cocaine Tony has stolen; they shoot at each other, and Dean, wounded, leaves Miles bleeding. He finds Connor at Nate's house, and shoots him dead before appearing to die of his injuries.

The Pyramid Texts

United Kingdom 2015
Director: the Shammasian Brothers
Certificate 12A 97m 0s

Reviewed by Samuel Wigley

From the pen of Coventry-born playwright, martial-arts expert and self-help instructor Geoff Thompson, this 90-minute one-man show has had a smattering of recent stage outings around the country and now arrives as a film version with veteran Scottish actor James Cosmo. It's a curious choice for big-screen treatment, taking the form of an extended monologue in which ageing boxer Ray records a long video message to his estranged son Bomber. Filmed in black-and-white and set entirely within the confines of an empty boxing gym, it's a film that's oddly out of pace with its own medium, a filmed performance rather than any conventional idea of a movie.

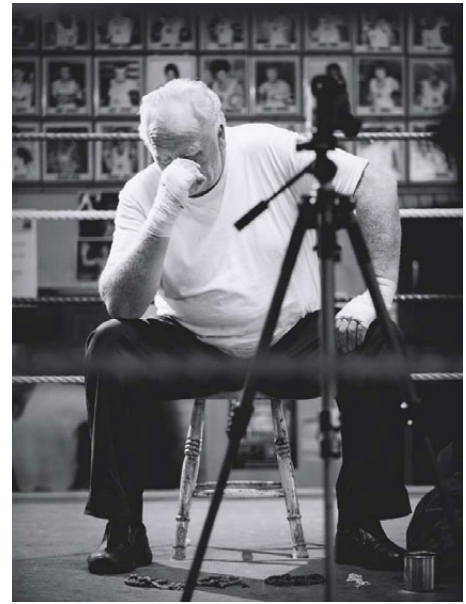
There's been a fine run of one-actor showcases in recent cinema. For all its contrivance, Tom Hardy's solitary motorway journey made for grippingly emotional drama in *Locke*, while Robert Redford's virtually wordless turn as a doomed yachtsman alone on the high seas for the duration of *All Is Lost* proved bracingly cinematic. By contrast, *The Pyramid Texts* feels like an interloper from fringe theatre. Here, the text is all and the images – moody *Raging Bull* monochrome though they may be – are merely document.

Sitting in the boxing ring talking into his camcorder, Ray speaks passionately about his love of fighting and his long career, and about great fighters like Joe Louis and Sugar Ray Robinson ("the greatest pound-for-pound boxer"). He argues for boxing as an ancient sport, underlining the importance of binding the hands to protect the bones before a fight – an image of mummification that gives the first clue to the film's title. The *Pyramid Texts* were Ancient Egyptian carvings, inscribed inside a pharaoh's sarcophagus before burial to ease his passage to the afterlife. And as debut directors the Shammasian brothers (Ludwig and Paul) film Ray's camera filming Ray while he lays bare his soul for the benefit of his absent son, so their movie positions the tired boxer's increasingly anguished threnody as a modern kind of spiritual embrocation and catharsis.

We see Bomber in occasional cutaways to a young man throwing practice punches, and learn how Ray's tough masculine demeanour prevented an honest emotional connection between the pair – with irrevocably damaging consequences for their relationship. Ray says he should never have given the impression that fear was to be ashamed of; after all, even the champions felt fear in their time. "We're all afraid to be afraid," he warns. "Giants expand their courage to facilitate their fear."

Pitched midway between mysticism and sports psychology, not all of Ray's pronouncements hit us as profoundly as the film would have it. There's no questioning the commitment in Cosmo's performance (for which he won a best acting prize at this year's Edinburgh Film Festival), but the script is pre-packaged as a tour de force for whichever actor takes it up. Holding him centre stage for an hour and a half, the film would have sunk irretrievably without an actor of Cosmo's calibre to carry us through its attenuated lament.

Yet it is an actorly recital, such as stage monologues usually call for. Intimately close up (closer than Ray's own camcorder will allow)



Gloves off: James Cosmo

to Cosmo's gruff, whiskered delivery, nothing convinces us that this is really a father intoning to his son. The thrill of words piled upon words is something we know from the theatre, but the camera captures little in the spaces between or around them to complicate or enrich them. We're told that Ray decided to film his soliloquy because a shop assistant told him "If you really want to convey emotion, let them see your face."

We see the face, we're moved by his plea, but there's something phoney, theatrical and self-impressed about *The Pyramid Texts* which ensures that the final purge of teary emotion misses its mark. **S**

Credits and Synopsis

Directed by the Shammasian Brothers [i.e. Ludwig Shammasian Paul Shammasian]	del Moral Music Stephen Hilton Sound Recordist Rhys Adams Costume Designer Emily Benedicta Wilson	Cast James Cosmo Ray Ethan Cosmo Bomber Andreas Evangelou sparring partner Sam Brown man
Produced by Ludwig Shammasian Cheyenne Conway Written by Geoff Thompson Director of Photography Sam Brown Edited by Paul Shammasian Production Designer Clara Gomez	©Soloscope Motion Pictures Production Company Soloscope Motion Pictures presents a Shammasian Brothers film Executive Producer Mike Morris	In Black and White [2.35:1] Distributor Soloscope Motion Pictures

The present. Ray, an ageing boxer, sets up a camcorder in the middle of the ring at an empty boxing gym. To the camera, he delivers a lengthy outpouring of regret and apology to his son, Bomber. He discusses boxing, former champions and his own experiences in the sport, and also how he closed himself off to his son, a boxer himself, because of his need to maintain a front of fearlessness and masculinity. Detailing how damaging such an approach was for their relationship, he relives the time that he ejected Bomber from his house, only to discover a couple of years later that his son was in hospital. After finishing his recording, Ray goes over to a coffin by the side of the ring and places the camcorder alongside Bomber's dead body.

Ricki and The Flash

USA 2015

Director: Jonathan Demme

Certificate 12A 101m 17s

Reviewed by Lisa Mullen

This unashamedly feelgood vehicle for Meryl Streep and her real-life daughter Mamie Gummer never sets out to tap fundamental truths about human existence, but it does offer the opportunity to enjoy the sight of a tattooed, leather-trousered Streep belting out an unhinged cover of Pink's 'Get the Party Started'. For some, that will be plenty, though fans of director Jonathan Demme (whose music-doc credentials go back to 1984's *Stop Making Sense*) and screenwriter Diablo Cody (whose reputation for whip-smart observational comedy was cemented by *Juno* and *Young Adult*) may be forgiven for feeling disappointed by such an insubstantial fluff ball of a film.

The plot is a straightforward redemption tale: Ricki (Streep) is the bad mother who walked out on her young family in order to follow her rock muse: now on the far slopes of middle age, she's a washed-up nobody scraping her rent together by working on the checkout of an upmarket food shop and living for the nights when she and her band The Flash play crowd-pleasing covers to a dwindling audience at a local bar. Any potential pathos in Ricki's situation is cancelled out, however, by her undiminished enthusiasm for her life choices, even when she is summoned back to Indiana by her ex-husband Pete (Kevin Kline), who is worried about their depressed daughter Julie (Gummer).

At this point, the film segues gently into standard fish-out-of-water territory, and some of its best comedy moments arise from the penniless Ricki's encounter with the deep-pile luxury of Pete's gated-community lifestyle. Still, her commitment to 'being Ricki' never wavers, despite her family's insistence on using her old name Linda and pummelling her with a lifetime's hurt and resentment. But never mind, because, wouldn't you know it, her unconventional energy turns out to be just the tonic this uptight family needs...

Like Ricki, the film senses that it has an inexorable destiny in life and refuses to swerve from it, but the inevitability of its happy ending



Road to rendition: Rick Springfield, Meryl Streep

threatens at times to become a millstone around its neck. There are a number of interesting questions lurking at the periphery of the story: what really drove young mother Linda to reject everything about herself and forge a new identity all those years ago? Why on earth did Pete call Ricki at this crucial moment, given that Julie repeatedly states that she detests her mother? Just how unpalatable are the rightwing views that are ascribed to Ricki but never properly spelt out? There is a palpable sense of punches being pulled, which is distracting if not actively annoying, because it's hard not to run an alternative movie in your head alongside the one that's up on screen.

But then, there's always Meryl Streep. Having learnt to play guitar especially for the role, she throws herself with uniquely Streepish immersiveness into the ten rock numbers that pepper the film, and it's impossible not to enjoy the ride. With gallant support from Rick Springfield as her besotted boyfriend and lead axeman Greg, and a roster of real-life rockers bolstering The Flash's grungy charms, Meryl and her band of grumpy old-timers will generally manage to bulldoze their way through your perfectly valid objections. 🍷

Straight Outta Compton

USA 2015

Director: F. Gary Gray

Certificate 15 146m 39s

Reviewed by Ashley Clark

F. Gary Gray's *Straight Outta Compton* is a sweeping, entertaining biopic of LA rap five-piece N.W.A. (aka Niggaz Wit Attitudes), which traces the group's origins in the late 1980s, its sudden rise to fame and its frequently turbulent fortunes up until the Aids-related passing in 1995, at the age of 31, of founder member Eric Wright aka Eazy-E.

In telling the N.W.A. story over a densely packed 147 minutes, Gray wisely plays it straight, favouring a propulsive, linear style unencumbered by the types of formal ostentation (fourth-wall breaks, overlapping voiceovers) that needlessly muddled other recent music biopics such as *Get on Up* and *Jersey Boys* (both 2014). Gray's biggest stylistic flourishes are intricate, winding tracking shots in the early scenes – often following the group as they seek to consummate their fame in nightclubs and at parties – which conjure the glamorous, languidly anticipatory air of films like *Goodfellas* (1990) and *Boogie Nights* (1997).

The film is much more fun to watch on its upswing, before it hits a plateau around the midway mark and the narrative becomes bogged down in the splintering group's financial woes. Manager Jerry Heller (Paul Giamatti, admirably maintaining a straight face under a bright-white fright wig) is eventually fingered as the chief baddie, cheating lyricist/rapper Ice Cube out of what he's owed and tempting Eazy-E away from his bandmates. But bowdlerised balance sheets and iffy invoices don't make for especially compelling drama.

Straight Outta Compton is, essentially, an inside job: polished and authorised, if not afraid to depict its characters as hot-tempered and human. It was produced in part by Wright's widow Tomica Woods-Wright, alongside Cube and former N.W.A. bandmate/production maestro Dr Dre. This pedigree is both a blessing and a curse. On one hand, it affords the film an unmistakable tang of authenticity and a lived-in feel. (Costume designer Kelli Jones also deserves credit for nailing the subtle shift in the group's attire from sports casual to high-end threads.) Gray also clearly has an affinity with his subjects, having previously worked with members of the group, most notably shooting the promo for Cube's 1993 hit single 'It Was a Good Day' and directing him in the 1995 cult stoner comedy *Friday*, whose laidback humour is also refreshingly present in *Straight Outta Compton*'s observational early stages. Gray draws convincing, naturalistic performances from his cast, including Cube's son, O'Shea Jackson Jr, who brilliantly replicates his father's scowling charisma.

However, with the band so deeply involved in the production, it was unlikely that *Straight Outta Compton* was ever going to be a warts-and-all treatment. Dr Dre's well-documented abuse of women ("It ain't no big thing – I just threw her through a door," he remarked after attacking rapper Denise 'Dee' Barnes at a party in 1991) is, troublingly, excised entirely. In general, women get the thin end of the wedge and, save for Dre's concerned mother and E's loyal wife, are presented as barely clothed eye-candy, ripe for ogling.

Credits and Synopsis

Produced by

Marc Platt
Gary Goetzman
Diablo Cody
Mason Novick

Written by

Diablo Cody

Director of

Photography

Declan Quinn

Edited by

Wyatt Smith

Production Designer

Stuart Wurtzel

Production Mixer

Jeff Pullman

Costume Designer

Ann Roth

©Columbia Pictures

Industries, Inc. and

LSC Film Corporation

Production

Companies

Tristar Pictures

presents in

association with

LStar Capital a

Marc Platt/Badwill

Entertainment

Production

A Jonathan

Demme picture

Executive Producers

Ron Bozman

Adam Siegel

Lorene Scafaria

Ben Waisbren

Cast

Meryl Streep

Linda Brummell,

'Ricki Rendazzo'

Kevin Kline

Pete

Mamie Gummer

Julie

Audra McDonald

Maureen

Sebastian Stan

Josh

Ben Platt

Daniel

Rick Springfield

Greg

Charlotte Rae

Oma

Nick Westrate

Adam

Hailey Gates

Emily

Rick Rosas

Buster

Joe Vitale

Joe

Bernie Worrell

Billy

Dolby Digital

In Colour

[2.35:1]

Distributor

Sony Pictures

Releasing

California, present day. Ageing rock chick Ricki is still passionate about her music, even though she and her band The Flash struggle to make ends meet with their one regular gig at a small local bar. When her ex-husband Pete calls to ask her to help her estranged daughter Julie, who is spiralling into depression following the breakdown of her marriage, Ricki returns to her hometown in Indiana. There, she is forced to reconnect with the family she broke away from years earlier when she left her young children to pursue her rock dreams.

At first, Julie and her brothers Adam and Josh are full of anger and resentment at Ricki's reappearance in their lives, but gradually they begin to accept and even like her. Ricki, meanwhile, remains unrepentant about her decision to walk out of her marriage, arguing that she had no choice but to be herself. Although Pete's wife – who has been away on business – soon returns and sends Ricki away, she later contrives to invite Ricki and her boyfriend Greg to Josh's wedding. Despite drawing disapproving looks from the guests due to their outlandish appearance, Ricki and her band play a surprise set, which gets everyone dancing and makes the wedding a success.



LA calling: Aldis Hodge, Neil Brown Jr, Jason Mitchell, O'Shea Jackson Jr, Corey Hawkins

Yet Gray pulls no punches in depicting the severe police brutality that directly informed the group's most controversial hit, 'Fuck tha Police', and the fiery 1988 debut LP that gives the film its title. Bracingly realistic scenes of white – and, in one chilling scene, black – LAPD officers behaving in a needlessly hostile, provocative manner to young black men will strike a chord with contemporary viewers accustomed to seeing such horrors unfold on a weekly if not daily basis in numbing cameraphone streams and police dashcam footage.

I saw *Straight Outta Compton* on the day that unarmed black motorist Samuel DuBose was shot in the head, at point blank range, by Officer Ray Tensing in Cincinnati, and it's therefore tempting to describe it as 'timely'. However, Gray's film slots into a disturbingly perennial lineage that includes *Do the Right Thing* (1989), *Malcolm X* (1992), *Fruitvale Station* (2013) and *Selma* (2014), all of which were released in

the wake of similar incidents and might therefore be described in the same way. It's better, then, to say that *Straight Outta Compton* is boldly reflective of a persistent social malaise: for the LA riots of 1992, read Ferguson in 2014 or Selma in 1965. Gray's insistence on situating the group's story within a wider social context is crucial to its deliberate positioning of N.W.A. as sharp documentarians of a culture they lived and breathed, rather than a band of thugs and agitators, a role into which they were so frequently cast by mainstream media.

This will be no revelation to N.W.A. fans, of course, but it's heartening to see due attention paid to the complexity of their work on such a grandly cinematic scale. In the early 1990s, spoofs such as *CB4* and *Fear of a Black Hat* skewered West Coast rap and made it all look rather silly; *Straight Outta Compton* may kick off a second cycle of backward-looking films treating the artform with the respect it deserves. **S**

Credits and Synopsis

Produced by
Ice Cube
Tomica Woods-Wright
Matt Alvarez
F. Gary Gray
Scott Bernstein
Dr. Dre
Screenplay
Jonathan Herman
Andrea Berloff
Story
S. Leigh Savidge
Alan Wenkus
Andrea Berloff

Director of Photography
Matthew Libatique
Edited by
Billy Fox
Michael Tronick
Production Designer
Shane Valentino
Score
Joseph Trapanese
Production
Sound Mixer
Willie Burton
Costume Designer

Kelli Jones
©Universal Studios and
Legendary Pictures
Productions, LLC
Production Companies
Universal Pictures
and
Legendary Pictures
present
in association with
New Line Cinema,
CubeVision, Crucial

Films a Broken Chair
Flickz production
An F. Gary Gray film
Executive Producers
Will Packer
Adam Merims
David Engel
Bill Straus
Thomas Tull
Jon Jashni
Film Extracts
Boyz n the Hood (1991)
xXx State of the

Union (2005)
Friday (1995)

Cast
O'Shea Jackson Jr
Ice Cube
Corey Hawkins
Dr. Dre
Jason Mitchell
Eazy-E
Neil Brown Jr
DJ Yella
Aldis Hodge

MC Ren
Paul Giamatti
Jerry Heller
R. Marcus Taylor
Suge Knight

Dolby Digital
In Colour
[2.35:1]

Distributor
Universal Pictures
International
UK & Ire

LA, 1986. The rap group N.W.A. is formed, composed of members Eazy-E, Dr Dre, Ice Cube, MC Ren, DJ Yella and Arabian Prince. Eazy-E co-founds Ruthless Records with veteran manager Jerry Heller, and the group soon finds success, releasing a platinum-selling LP, 'Straight Outta Compton' in 1988. N.W.A. start to attract controversy on account of their anti-establishment lyrics, prompting an FBI investigation. Rapper and lyricist Ice Cube leaves in 1989 over royalty disputes, and forges a solo career.

N.W.A. continue until 1991, at which point they disband; Dr Dre co-founds Death Row Records with former band associate Suge Knight, who had previously threatened Eazy-E and Heller with violence in order to force them to release Dre from his contract. Dre ultimately becomes frustrated with Knight's thuggish tactics, and founds a new record label, Aftermath. Cube, Dre and Eazy-E discuss a potential reunion, but Eazy-E dies of Aids-related complications before this can happen.

A Syrian Love Story

United Kingdom/Sweden/Denmark 2015

Director: Sean McAllister

Certificate 12A 75m 40s

Reviewed by Philip Kemp

As a documentary filmmaker, Sean McAllister has a knack for winding up in dangerous places. He denies doing this intentionally, but his refusal to accept bland official explanations and his determination to follow his stories through often lead him into situations that most of us would fast back away from with a placatory giggle. While shooting *The Reluctant Revolutionary* (2012) he found himself one of a rapidly dwindling band of foreign correspondents being stalked by the nastier elements of the Yemeni security forces. *A Syrian Love Story* saw him venture even closer to the lethal edge. While researching his story, about people the Assad regime took a decidedly dim view of, he was caught wearing an HD camera concealed in his sunglasses and slung into a Damascus jail. Only the concerted efforts of Channel 4 and the Foreign Office got him out unharmed after five days.

The subjects of McAllister's film were far less lucky. Both Amer, a Palestinian, and his Syrian wife Raghda spent a long time in Assad's jails and suffered serious ill treatment. They first met when Amer, having made a tiny hole in the wall separating their cells, saw his future wife's face covered in blood. Even this didn't deter them, and especially not Raghda, from further activism. When McAllister first encounters Amer in 2009, Raghda is back in jail, while Amer cares for their sons Kaka and Bob. And her sense of what she owes to her tormented country ("I consider it treason if I abandon Syria now") is what makes theirs ultimately a tragic story.

McAllister's persistence in sticking with his story over six years pays off handsomely in terms of revelation. When we first meet Raghda, freed from jail in 2011 during the Arab Spring, she's clearly inhibited about talking to camera and her responses are guarded. Three years later, with the family granted political asylum in the quiet old Languedoc city of Albi, both she and Amer treat McAllister and his camera like a family friend and even a confessor, talking openly and often bitterly about the rift growing between them.



Freedom fighter: Raghda

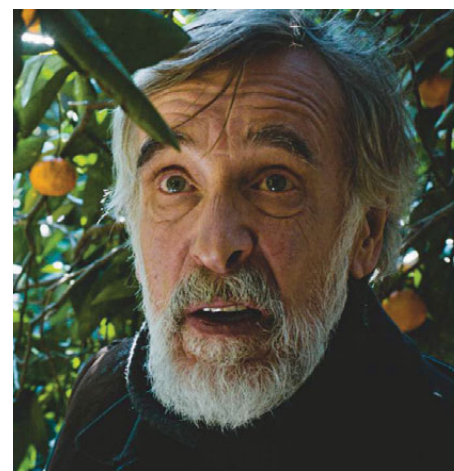
Tangerines

Estonia/Georgia 2013
Director: Zaza Urushadze

Reviewed by Anton Bitel

While *Tangerines* opens with a brief onscreen text describing the 1992 civil war between ethnic Georgians and Russian-supported Abkhaz separatists that sent most local Estonian settlers fleeing back home, the first images we see in the film are of 'Grandpa' Ivo (Estonian acting legend Lembit Ulfsak) sawing wood in his workshop to make boxes. His profession as a carpenter is enough to bring to mind the coffin maker who figures prominently in Kurosawa Akira's *Yojimbo* (1961) and Sergio Leone's reimagining *A Fistful of Dollars* (1964) – both set, like *Tangerines*, in middle-of-nowhere villages riven by conflict. Yet the old man's crates are being built neither to house corpses nor, as the Chechen mercenary Ahmed (Giorgi Nakhashidze) suspects, to contain bombs, but for a more civilised purpose: to transport the tangerines that Margus (Elmo Nüganen), the village's only other remaining inhabitant, hopes to pick before heading back to Estonia. Far from setting the village's opposed forces against one another like the man-with-no-name protagonists of Kurosawa's and Leone's films, Ivo is a peacemaker, taking in under one roof both Ahmed and the Georgian volunteer fighter Nika (Mikhail Meskhi) after both are injured in a skirmish. There, he will gradually teach these two sworn enemies lessons in civics and humanity, even as the realities of war close in on the village's idyll.

"Cinema is a big fraud," Ivo declares to Margus and local doctor Juhan (Raivo Trass), explaining why the military van they have just sent rolling over an incline did not explode like it would in the movies. Through these words, Georgian writer-director Zaza Urushadze (*Three Houses*, *The Guardian*) positions *Tangerines* outside the typical conventions of war movies – although the film is, with its exploration of cross-cultural hostilities within a single domestic setting, somewhat reminiscent of Aleksandr V. Rogozhkin's *The Cuckoo* (2002). Spectacle is mostly kept to the periphery or the horizon, leaving Urushadze to focus on the mindset – and the grimly universal



Special branch: Lembit Ulfsak

aftermath – of internecine strife. We learn that in his former life Nika was an actor, occasionally even appearing in films ("They almost don't make films over here any more," he complains with unintended reflexivity, "No money"), and here too everyone is playing a role: the recovering Ahmed dresses in his host's civilian clothes; when the militia arrives, Nika must pretend to be a mute Abkhaz soldier (under Ivo's direction). Another Abkhaz militia will mistake Ahmed for a Georgian, and find itself under fire from both him and Nika. Meanwhile Ivo, in this no man's land for old men, has stopped seeing his guests in terms of sides, and hangs around (where others, including his surviving family, have left) to honour the dead.

With shots typically framed to show Ivo between Ahmed and Nika, *Tangerines* is a plea for reconciliation and understanding in a world of belligerent opposition. Ivo's woodwork may eventually turn to coffin making (as in *Yojimbo*), but his is the kind of carpentry associated with the character and moral teachings of Jesus. This Estonian-Georgian co-production is a bittersweet non-epic that finds just the right balance between hope and despair. Ⓢ

For this is the unlooked-for distressful outcome of their story: that while Amer and the boys are happy to have found peace and freedom from persecution, Raghda is racked with guilt over – as she sees it – having abandoned her country. "I feel like a loser," she says despondently.

It doesn't help, either, that Amer has taken a lover, since as he sees it Raghda's obsession with her country has alienated her from him and her family. "You are not a lover," he accuses her. "Go back to being a mother." She counters with charges of selfishness: "You feel only your pain. You never feel the pain of others." The end is inevitable: leaving Amer and her sons in the peace of Albi (a city that, ironically, was at one time riven by sectarian strife), she returns to her beloved Syria, or as close as she can safely get. And to her, at least, this is a happy ending of sorts. "I have this hope for freedom, for my country," she tells us. "But now I start." Ⓢ

Credits and Synopsis

Produced by Elhum Shakerifar Sean McAllister	Worldview Made with the support of the BFI's Film Fund	In Colour [1.78:1]
Filmed by Sean McAllister	Production A10ft Films Ltd	Subtitles
Film Editor Matt Scholes	Production BBC Storyville	Distributor BFI Distribution
Art Directors Jack Woodhams	Production In association with SVT - Sveriges Television AB and DR - Danish Broadcast Corporation	
Composer Terence Dunn	Production Executive Producers	
Dubbing Mixer Bob Jackson	Production for 10ft Films: Hoshang Waziri	
	Production for BFI: Lizzie Francke	
	Production Companies	
	BFI and BBC	
	Storyville present	
	a 10ft Films Ltd production	
	A film by Sean McAllister	
	With development support from	

In 2009, documentary-maker Sean McAllister visits Syria, then being touted as a modernising tourist paradise, and meets Amer, a Palestinian freedom fighter recently released from jail. While in prison, Amer had met and fallen in love with Raghda, a Syrian activist jailed for writing a book criticising President Assad. On their release they married and had two sons, Kaka and Bob, but then Raghda had been rearrested.

In 2011, Raghda is released during the Arab Spring. The family move from Tartus on the coast to Damascus. As Assad's repression of the freedom demonstrations intensifies they move again, first to a Palestinian refugee camp and then in 2012 to Lebanon. Meanwhile McAllister himself is arrested by Syrian security forces and held for five days, but released unharmed.

Raghda travels secretly to Syria, returning after three months. The family (including Amer's sons Shadi and Fadi) are granted asylum in France, moving first to Paris and then in 2014 to Albi in the south-west of the country. The boys settle in and soon feel more French than Syrian. Amer and Raghda, though, become increasingly alienated from one another, especially when Amer takes a girlfriend. They argue, often using McAllister as a sounding board. Finally Raghda leaves her family and moves to Gaziantep in Turkey, a few miles from the Syrian border, where she becomes cultural and political adviser to the Syrian opposition government in exile.

Credits and Synopsis

Producers Ivo Felt Zaza Urushadze	Supported by Eurimages in co-operation with Estonian Film Foundation, Georgian National Film Centre, Estonian Ministry of Culture, Georgian Ministry of Culture, Cultural Endowment of Estonia	In Colour [2.35:1]
Scriptwriter Zaza Urushadze	Developed in co-operation with Cinema 24 & MTÜ Otaku	Subtitles
Idea by Artur Veeber Zaza Urushadze Tatjana Mülbeier		Distributor Axiom Films International Limited
Director of Photography Rein Kotov		Estonian theatrical title
Editor Alexander Kuranov		Mandarin
Production Designer Thea Telia		
Composer Niaz Diasamidze		
Sound Design Harmo Kallaste		
Costume Designer Simon Machabeli		
Cast Lembit Ulfsak Ivo Giorgi Nakhashidze Ahmed Elmo Nüganen Margus Mikhail Meskhi Nika Raivo Trass Doctor Juhan		
©Allfilm-Cinema 24		
Production Companies A film by Zaza Urushadze		

Abkhazia, Georgia, 1992. While the other ethnic Estonians have fled their small village in the face of civil war, old carpenter Ivo and tangerine grower Margus have stayed on. Wounded in a skirmish that kills all their comrades, Chechen mercenary Ahmed and Georgian volunteer Nika are taken in and tended by Ivo. Recovering quickly, Ahmed swears revenge on his bedridden enemy, but Ivo persuades him first to leave Nika alone until he has regained consciousness, and then not to attack him so long as they remain under the same roof. When an Abkhaz militia calls by, Ivo persuades both Ahmed and Nika to maintain the ruse that Nika is an Abkhaz. After this, when Nika steps outside, Ahmed does not attack him. At a tense outdoor dinner, Ivo insists on drinking a toast "to death". Shortly afterwards, stray shells destroy Margus's house and groves. Margus rejects Ahmed's offer of payment to return to Estonia. A second Abkhaz militia arrives, and when the captain gives orders to shoot Ahmed, believed to be a Georgian, Nika opens fire on the militiamen, and is helped by Ahmed. Margus and Nika are killed in crossfire. Ivo buries Margus in his grove, and Nika by the grave of his own son (killed by Georgians). Ahmed heads home.

3 ½ Minutes

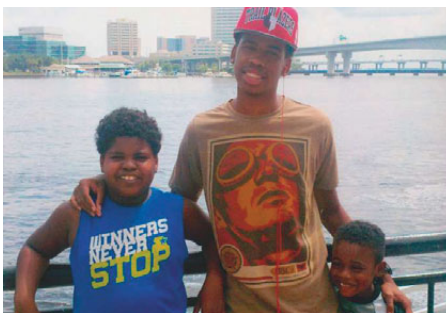
USA/United Kingdom 2015
Director: Marc Silver

Reviewed by Thirza Wakefield

Director Marc Silver's 2013 film *Who Is Dayani Crista?* came late to the spate of true-phenomena docs that unfolded like mystery thrillers and met with acclaim a few years ago. Tracing the identity of a dead migrant worker from a cryptic tattoo on his chest, *Dayani* took after films such as Malik Bendjelloul's Oscar-winning *Searching for Sugar Man* and Bart Layton's *The Imposter* (both 2012). Silver takes a different tack with his latest film, for good reason. Free of the flourishes that marred *Dayani* (which, like *The Imposter*, used dramatic re-enactment, with Gael García Bernal in the role of the deceased), 3 ½ *Minutes* tells a story that isn't nearly so unique or unthinkable as *Sugar Man*'s Lazarus-narrative.

Nine months after the murder of Trayvon Martin, for which crime his killer was acquitted, African-American teenager Jordan Davis was shot and killed by Michael Dunn at a gas station in Jacksonville, Florida. Davis and his three friends – Tevin Thompson, Tommie Stornes and Leland Brunson – had stopped to buy gum and cigarettes. The 45-year-old Dunn, drawing up alongside Stornes's red Dodge Durango, complained that the boys' music was too loud; would they turn it down? Thompson did as asked, but Davis, demurring, had Thompson turn it back up. Following a contested brief exchange, Dunn fired ten bullets into the car. What passed between Davis and Dunn in the short time between the former's protestation and the latter's reaching for his gun became the central question at Dunn's subsequent trial for first-degree murder.

Taking full advantage of permission to film the court case, Silver assembles an approximate picture of what happened in the titular time period, splicing witness testimonies with surveillance footage from inside the gas-station store. He makes effective use of radio phone-ins, giving voice to the breadth of public opinion and requisitioning perspectives drowned out by louder newscasts. Silver's excellent pacing is apparent in the way he staggers increasingly incriminating excerpts of phone conversations between Dunn and girlfriend Rhonda Rouer, who was in the gas-station shop at the time of the incident. It's late in the film that we hear Dunn's musings on the



Victim of hate: Jordan Davis

violent "subculture" to which he believes Davis belonged, and about which he plans to "make a public statement": "No wonder people are afraid to tell them to pick up their pants."

Much like Joe Berlinger and Bruce Sinofsky's brilliant *Paradise Lost* trilogy (1996-2011), which probed the prosecution of three adolescent boys charged with serial murder, seemingly scapegoated for their interest in heavy-metal music, Silver's film examines the cultural profiling of Davis and friends, whose playing of rap music was the ostensible cause of the fatal confrontation. (Dunn allegedly referred to the genre as "thug music".) Silver leaves it largely to Davis's father and the survivors of the shooting to discuss the racial prejudice that informs such an opinion.

Silver's greatest achievement, however, is in trusting in the drama of the courtroom: each player with his or her distinctive role; the theatre of opening and closing statements; the lawyer preparing his witness. This confidence has allowed Silver to renounce the dramatic reconstruction that here would have disrespected his subject and undermined his theme, which is truth.

The film is at its most fascinating when it gives a window on the workings of the US legal system, allowing the viewer to see how invoking the controversial stand-your-ground law makes it possible to get away with murder. 3 ½ *Minutes* is both gripping and scrupulous, showing Silver to be capable of composure while unequivocally defying the bigotry given necessary voice in his film. **S**

Credits and Synopsis

Produced by
Minnette Nelson
Carolyn Hepburn
Cinematography
Marc Silver
Edited by
Emiliano Battista
Gideon Gold
Original Music
Todd Boekeheide
Supervising

**Sound Editor/
Sound Designer**
Vanessa Lorena Tate

@Jordan Davis
Movie LLC
**Production
Companies**
Participant Media
presents a The
Filmmaker Fund/

Motto Pictures
production in
association with
LakeHouse Films
and Actual Films
A film by Marc Silver
Major funding
provided by the John
D. and Catherine
T. MacArthur
Foundation, the Ford

Foundation, JustFilms
Supported by a
grant from the
Sundance Institute
Documentary Film
Program, the Gucci
Tribeca Documentary
Fund, the Sundance
Catalyst Initiative
A sponsored project of
IFP - the Independent

Filmmaker Project
Bertha Foundation -
BritDoc, Tribeca Film
Institute, Candescant
Films, Weissberg
Foundation, the
Fledgling Fund,
Good Pitch - Made
by BritDoc
Executive Producers
Orlando Bagwell

Bonni Cohen
Julie Goldman
Jeff Skoll
Diane Weyermann

In Colour
[1.78:1]

Distributor
Dogwoof

A documentary about the 2014 criminal trials of Michael Dunn, who was charged with the murder of African-American teenager Jordan Davis, whom he shot at a gas station in Jacksonville, Florida, in November 2012. Director Marc Silver films the legal proceedings, intercutting witness testimony with surveillance footage from inside the gas station. He interviews Davis's parents, girlfriend and three survivors of the shooting and shows footage of

protests and press activity. We hear excerpts of phone calls between Dunn and his girlfriend, who was with him on the night of the incident, as well as news coverage and radio phone-ins polling public opinion.

A jury finds Dunn guilty of three counts of attempted second-degree murder, but fails to come to a consensus about the first-degree murder charge. Dunn is convicted on this last count at a retrial, and sentenced to life without parole.

Vacation

USA 2015
Directors: Jonathan Goldstein, John Francis Daley
Certificate 15 98m 53s

Reviewed by Anna Smith

"I've never heard of the original vacation," says James Griswold. "Doesn't matter. The new vacation will stand on its own, OK?" says his father Rusty (Ed Helms). And so this potential *National Lampoon* reboot announces its intentions. Inspired by the 1983 comedy, it sees Rusty attempt to relive his youth with a family road trip to Walley World, with predictable mishaps along the way.

Narratively, the film is driven by the unspoken marital tension between Rusty and Debbie (Christina Applegate) and the problematic dynamic between their two sons. Outspoken younger brother Kevin (Steele Stebbins) bullies older, awkward James (Skyler Gisondo), to occasionally amusing effect, but workable character humour is too often abandoned for laboured gross-out sequences such as a mud bath in what turns out to be sewage. It's an undisciplined directorial debut from writer-directors John Francis Daley and Jonathan Goldstein, who scripted the similarly mixed *Horrible Bosses* (2011).

And while this *Vacation* swiftly and symbolically does away with the stereotypical sexy lady in the red sports car – as seen in the 1983 original – it's still a throwback in which moms stay at home and men make the decisions, however unwise they may be. **S**

Credits and Synopsis

Produced by
David Dobkin
Chris Bender
Written by
Jonathan Goldstein
John Francis Daley
**Director of
Photography**
Barry Peterson
Editor
Jamie Gross
**Production
Designer**
Barry Robison
Music
Mark Mothersbaugh
Sound Mixer
Mary Ellis
**Costume
Designed by**
Debra McGuire

Benderspink/Big Kid
Pictures Production
**Executive
Producers**
Marc S. Fischer
Jeff Kleeman
Toby Emmerich
Richard Brenner
Samuel J. Brown
Dave Neustadter
Steven Mnuchin

Adena
Ron Livingstone
Ethan

**Dolby Digital
In Colour**
[2.35:1]

Distributor
Warner Bros.
Pictures
International (UK)

Cast
Ed Helms
Rusty Griswold
Christina Applegate
Debbie Griswold
Beverly D'Angelo
Ellen Griswold
Chris Hemsworth
Stone Crandall
Leslie Mann
Audrey Crandall
Steele Stebbins
Kevin Griswold
Skyler Gisondo
James Griswold
Chevy Chase
Clark Griswold
Charlie Day
Chad
Catherine Missal

Chicago, present day. Rusty Griswold decides to take wife Debbie and sons James and Kevin on a road trip to amusement park Walley World. They stop in Tennessee and Arkansas, where they are robbed. In Texas they visit Rusty's sister and her husband. At an Arizona campsite, Rusty and Debbie are nearly arrested after trying to have sex in public. When their car runs out of petrol, they get a lift to San Francisco, staying at a B&B run by Rusty's parents. Finally they arrive at Walley World, where they are drawn into a fight with a bully and are stranded on the 'Velociraptor' ride, where they bond. Rusty takes Debbie to Paris to rekindle their relationship.

A Walk in the Woods

USA/South Korea 2015
Director: Ken Kwapis
Certificate 15 104m 4s

Reviewed by Matthew Taylor

Robert Redford first envisioned *A Walk in the Woods*, a loose adaptation of Bill Bryson's 1998 travel memoir, back in 2005 as a reunion vehicle for himself and Paul Newman. Redford – in an unlikely feat of casting – would play the professorial writer, Newman his wayward, shambolic travelling companion Stephen Katz, with the brittle friendship between the two explored during a stuttering attempt to hike the 2,000-mile Appalachian Trail between Georgia and Maine. Mired in development after Newman's death, the film that finally emerges – with a grizzled Nick Nolte as Katz – is a fitfully entertaining old-timer odyssey, one that occasionally captures the wry humour of Bryson's prose. Yet despite game turns by the sparring veterans, the journey taken feels overstretched some way before its culmination.

Recent films dealing with epic ventures into the great outdoors have foregrounded their protagonists' burning motivations for travel: a cleansing retreat from grief and destructive hedonism in *Wild* (2014); disaffection with modern life in *Into the Wild* (2007); a pilgrimage for the fallen in *The Way* (2010). For Bryson, who had just returned to the US after two decades in Britain, the hike primarily offered a chance to rediscover his native homeland. But in making the author and Katz much older than the fortysomethings they were at the time, the film adds an additional incentive: the encroaching shadow of mortality. It gives the ensuing trek, with all its inherent risks, the semblance of a last big hurrah. Redford's Bryson nearly scraps the idea altogether after his anxious wife (a briefly seen Emma Thompson) nixes his initial plan to travel solo. That's when Katz, a blustering, randy bohemian not seen since his and Bryson's student backpacking days, makes his surprise appearance. The intervening years have seen one of them become a contented, successful family man; the other, a shiftless philanderer in and out of the drunk tank.

It's this awkward realisation that underscores much of the comedy – and heightens what pathos



Ambling pros: Robert Redford, Nick Nolte

there is. There's plenty in *A Walk in the Woods* that's played broad: the duo's painfully slow progress, close shaves with bears, the indignity of dormitory lodgings, caricatured fellow hikers. But what resonates is the spectacle of two men estranged by time, each trying to comprehend the other's life but not really succeeding. Katz is incredulous at the long-married Bryson's monogamy, and appears crestfallen when the author declines to engage with a flirtatious motel owner (Mary Steenburgen). Bryson, meanwhile, continually despairs at Katz's utter lack of inhibition and reckless impulses. Their bickering interplay often recalls that in Alexander Payne's *Sideways* (2004), a road comedy that also teamed a cultured, reserved straight man with a brash, sex-obsessed stooge. However, journeyman director Ken Kwapis doesn't have Payne's knack for bittersweet nuance – his competent but rather colourless handling allows Redford and Nolte ample space to have fun, but the actors can only do so much with a script that never quite makes the most of their characters.

The road here is dotted with intermittent pleasures – cinematographer John Bailey's handsome master shots vividly convey the rugged landscape, even as the soundtrack lays on the pastoral folksiness a little too thickly. Yet with the ramblers' travails leading to diminishing returns, there's a sense that a whole lot more mileage could have been gained from the situation. **S**

The World of Astley Baker Davies

United Kingdom 1985 – 2012, Directors: Mark Baker, Neville Astley, Certificate 12A 75m 54s

Reviewed by Sukhdev Sandhu

It's curious that animators Mark Baker and Neville Astley are still far from being household names. Their work – *Jolly Roger*, *The Big Knights*, *Peppa Pig*, *Ben & Holly's Little Kingdom* – is beloved by the industry (winning not only Baftas but also Oscar nominations) and children and adults alike for its gladsome medley of endearing characters, mock-heroic adventures and perky catchphrases ("Muddy puddles!" "Jelly flood!"). But the makers themselves give few interviews, appear to have no interest in creating self-consciously edgy and adult-orientated fare like *Crapston Villas* and *Monkey Dust*, and haven't made the transition to full-length-feature status as seamlessly as Nick Park.

The World of Astley Baker Davies (their producer is Phil Davies) offers a welcome opportunity to see their individual films in the context of a body of work spanning three decades. Though this is by no means a complete retrospective, it brings together solo projects and music videos as well as their more recent, franchise-spawning series (*Peppa Pig* even has a theme park in the New Forest, Hampshire). It's especially intriguing to see the work of the animators before the pair began their collaboration in 1994.

Baker's shorts are the most striking. Compared with his later films, *The Hill Farm* (1989), a cel animation made using wax pencils, has an artisanal, handmade quality. It's also more muted: literally so – with narration and dialogue replaced by sound effects and music (the latter by future Wallace and Gromit composer Julian Nott). It verges at times on satiric dark pastoral, with a cast of characters including a farmer's wife who casually snaps a chicken's neck, guileless photographers who are almost gobbled by a bearlike creature, and viciously gung-ho hunters who go around shooting animals. Equally powerful is *The Village* (1993). In a community reminiscent of the carceral enclave in Patrick McGoochan's *The Prisoner* (1967-68), a nun steals apples from orchards, a priest is a secret alcoholic, and everyone else is either an adulterer, a prude or a brute. These films' quotidian violence, medieval atmospherics and almost East European aesthetic are absent in the second part of this collection; it's hard not to assume that Astley is responsible for the turn to jollification.

These days the pair's most popular series are global successes, translated into languages from Slovenian to Chinese. Yet, especially when watched alongside the US shows that mostly fill up the schedules of children's networks, they're distinguished by a quiet and almost defiant sense of Englishness: it's there in the bright colour schemes that appear more felt-tipped than pixelated; pacing that's courtly rather than ADD-accelerated; modulated sound designs that eschew the compressed aggression of American shows.

That Englishness – a Home Counties-accented version of it – can be heard in Brian Blessed's Pirate King in *Jolly Roger* and Richard Ridings's Daddy Pig in *Peppa Pig*, both exuding a 'keep calm and carry on' amiability free of that phrase's austerity-conservatism appropriation. *The Big Knights*, in which the two gallants lie at night on adjacent beds, brings to mind

Credits and Synopsis

Produced by

Robert Redford
Bill Holderman
Chip Diggins

Screenplay

Rick Kerb
Bill Holderman
Based on the book
by Bill Bryson

Director of

Photography

John Bailey

Edited by

Carol Littleton
Julie Garcés

Production Designer

Gae S. Buckley

Original Music

Nathan Larson

Sound Mixer

Shirley Libby

Costume Designer

Leigh Leverett

Route One Films

presents in
association with
Union Investment
Partners, Surefire

Entertainment

Capital, IM Global a

Wildwood Enterprises

production

A film by Ken Kwapis

Completed with

assistance from

the Georgia Film,

Music & Digital

Entertainment Office

Executive Producers

Jeremiah Samuels

Jake Eberts

Jay Stern

Russell Levine

Lee Jea Woo

Jared D. Underwood

Andrew C. Robinson

Nick Nolte

Stephen Katz

Kristen Schal

Mary Ellen

Nick Offerman

REI Dave

Mary Steenburgen

Jeannie

Emma Thompson

Catherine Bryson

Dolby Digital/

DataSat

In Colour

[2.35:1]

Distributor

El Films

New Hampshire, present day. Having moved back to the US following an extended stay in Britain, writer Bill Bryson becomes curious about the Appalachian Trail, a 2,000-mile hiking route that passes by his house. Forbidden by his wife to tackle the challenging walk alone, Bryson finds an unlikely travelling companion in old friend Stephen Katz, a wayward recovering alcoholic. Starting in Georgia, the pair quickly find the hike tougher than expected, encountering extreme conditions, bears and annoying fellow hikers. Bryson finds a stashed whisky bottle in the supposedly sober Katz's backpack. Reaching Tennessee, the exhausted Bryson and Katz realise that they have completed only a fraction of the trail. Bryson rebuffs a flirtatious motel proprietor, while Katz incurs the wrath of a woman's husband. Bryson talks Katz out of buying a car to continue the journey. In Virginia, Bryson confronts Katz about his drinking. A fall leaves the pair stranded on a mountain ledge overnight. After being rescued, both admit their desire to go home.

Later, Bryson receives postcards from Katz describing further trail attempts. Bryson begins writing a book on the hike.

©Big Walk
Productions, LLC
Production
Companies

Cast

Robert Redford

Bill Bryson

Morecambe and Wise's shared bedroom. *Living in a Mobile Home*, a 1985 video made for performance poet John Hegley's band The Popticians (and the only solo Astley film in this package), has a touch of Bob Godfrey-style anarchy in its depiction of the narrator's mum as a Hilda Ogden-style washerwoman who occasionally breaks into wobbly-kneed dance.

For the most part the anthology is sequenced chronologically, and it's fun to spot the emergence and re-emergence of visual motifs (isolated homes constructed on top of lofty hills, *mise en scène* being revealed through dense forestry) and character types (chubby, bestubbled papas). At the same time, it's odd to watch short films – especially those like *Ben & Holly's Little Kingdom* – compacted together like this: they were devised serially, and work their magic through repetition, not least when watched on DVD or through online playlists. Still, that's a minor caveat: *The World of Astley Baker Davies* is a marvellous portal, a retrospective that leaves you excited about their future projects. **B**



The right lines: *Peppa Pig*

Credits and Synopsis

The Hill Farm

United Kingdom 1989

Directed by
Mark Baker
Written by
Mark Baker
Camera
Clare Tyler
Danny Boon
Editor
Annie Kocur
Music
Julian Nott
Sound
Danny Hambrook
Animation
Mark Baker

©NFTS

Colour by
Technicolor
[1.85:1]

The Village

United Kingdom 1993

Directed by
Mark Baker
Producer
Pam Dennis
Written by
Mark Baker
Camera
Jim Davey
Editor
Annie Kocur
Music
Julian Nott
Sound
Danny Hambrook

©Channel Four
Television
Production Companies
A Pizzazz Pictures
production for
Channel Four
Television

Voice Cast

Annie Griffin
Dave Western
James Baker

Dolby Stereo
In Colour
[1.85:1]

Living in a Mobile Home
United Kingdom 1985

Film by
Neville Astley

Production Company
Middlesex Polytechnic

In Colour
[1.42:1]

Jolly Roger
United Kingdom 1998

Directed by
Mark Baker
Produced by
Claire Jennings
Written by
Mark Baker
Editor
Annie Kocur
Music
Julian Nott
Sound
Danny Hambrook

©Channel Four
Television Corporation
Production Companies
An Astley Baker/
Silver Bird production
for Channel Four
Television

Voice Cast
Morwenna Banks
Estelle
Gordon Kennedy

Captain Jolly/Hugo
John Sparkes
Captain Roger

[uncrated]
Brian Blessed
Pirate King

Dolby SR
Colour by
Metrocolor
[1.85:1]

Peppa Pig
Episode: Funfair
United Kingdom 2009

Directed by
Neville Astley
Mark Baker
Producer
Phil Davies
Writers
Neville Astley
Mark Baker
Phil Hall

Created by
Mark Baker
Editor
Phil Davies
Design
Taig McNab

Manu Roig
Sarah Roper
Alistair Douglas
Music
Julian Nott

Sound Design/Mix
Jake Roberts
Barnaby Templer

Director of Animation
Joris van Hulzen

©Astley Baker
Davies Ltd/E1 Kids
Production Companies
An Astley Baker
Davies Ltd/E1
Kids production in
association with
Nick Jr. and Five

Executive Producer

Laura Clunie

Voice Cast

Peppa
John Sparkes
narrator/Mr Rabbit/
Mr Fox/Mr Potato
Richard Ridings
Daddy Pig
Morwenna Banks
Mummy Pig/
Madame Gazelle/
Dr Hamster the vet

In Colour
[1.85:1]

Ben & Holly's Little Kingdom
Episode: Granny
& Granpapa
United Kingdom 2012

Directed by
Neville Astley
Mark Baker
Producer
Phil Davies
Writers
Neville Astley
Mark Baker
Sam Morrison

Created by
Neville Astley
Editor
Mark Baker
Design
Tomas Gisby

Tim Frost
Sarah Roper
Alistair Douglas
Jemima Williams

Music
Julian Nott
Sound Design/Mix
Jake Roberts
Barnaby Templer

Director of Animation
Joris van Hulzen

©Astley Baker
Davies Ltd/E1 Kids
Production Companies
An Astley Baker
Davies Ltd/E1
Kids production in
association with
Nick Jr. and Five

Created by
Neville Astley
Mark Baker
Producer
Phil Davies
Writers
Neville Astley
Mark Baker
Gary Parker

John Sparkes
Neville Astley
Mark Baker

Joris van Hulzen

©Astley Baker Davies
Ltd/eOne UK Ltd
Production Companies
An Astley Baker
Davies Ltd/eOne
Family production
in association
with Nick Jr.

Executive Producers
Laura Clunie
Olivier Dumont

Voice Cast

Preston Nyman
Ben
Sian Taylor
Holly
Ian Puleston-Davies
King Thistle
Sara Crowe
Queen Thistle/Lucy's
mum/Mrs Witch

In Colour
[1.85:1]

The Big Knights
Episode: Lost Doris
United Kingdom
1999/2009

Directed by
Neville Astley
Mark Baker
Special Edition
Director
Claire Jennings

Produced by
Claire Jennings
Special Edition
Producer
Phil Davies

Written by
Neville Astley
Mark Baker
Sound Design/Mix
Jake Roberts
Barnaby Templer

Director of Animation
Joris van Hulzen

Created by
Neville Astley
Mark Baker
Producer
Phil Davies
Writers
Neville Astley
Mark Baker
Gary Parker

John Sparkes
Neville Astley
Mark Baker

Editor

Lorna Hardy

Artwork

Mark Baker
Mic Graves

Music

Peter Baikie

Sound Design

Hilary Wyatt

Animation Director

Neville Astley

Production Companies

Originally produced
by BBC Worldwide/
The Big Knights Ltd
in association with
BBC Bristol 1999
Special edition
produced by
Astley Baker
Davies [in 2009]

Executive Producers
for the BBC:
Colin Rose
Helen Nabarro

Voice Cast

Brian Blessed
Sir Morris
David Rintoul
Sir Boris
Alexander
Armstrong

Timothy West
King Otto
Prunella Scales
Queen Melissa

In Colour
[1.85:1]
2009 Special
Edition presented
the animation's
original aspect ratio
for the first time.

Production Companies
Sun Entertainment
Culture
Six Doors Film

Distributor
Independent
Cinema Office

Zombie Fight Club

Director: Joe Chien

Reviewed by Shelagh Rowan-Legg

As a monster, the zombie is often a means to explore the disintegration of civilisation and society – the danger comes not from the zombies themselves (at least not in the long term) but from other humans. That's not to say that every zombie film needs a deep philosophical theme, and a certain lack of taste is to be expected, though usually it's tongue-in-cheek, so excessive as to invite laughter.

Unfortunately, Taipei-set *Zombie Fight Club*, with its weak script, poor direction, bad acting and misogyny, can't even call itself a fun romp of excess. When every female character (save one) is scantily clad and barely speaks except to scream, it's less of a cause for laughter than mild disgust. The stereotypes run from oversexed young people to cops both good and bad; and as the women turn into zombies and bite their sexual partners' appendages off, the parade of clichés becomes tedious to the point of wishing for the undead to be victorious.

At one point, a zombie is transformed into a bizarre alien creature with an open-fanged mouth where its chest should be, but this brief moment of originality is soon abandoned.

The mark of a great B-movie, a movie that's good even as it's bad, is commitment by all involved. Perhaps that's what's missing here. The poor quality of the production could have been forgiven if the film had only committed to its scenario. But instead, *Zombie Fight Club* is the worst example of B-movie horror, boring instead of exciting, derivative instead of inventive. **C**

Credits and Synopsis

Producers

Gordon Chan
Paco Wong
Paul Cheng

Screenplay

Joe Chien

Directors of Photography

A Camera:
Yu-Tang Lin
B Camera:
Marco Yang

Film Editors

Liao Guo Xing
Jimmy Lin

Art Director

Joe Chien

Original Music

Wei Chun Chen

Location

Jeh Yang

Costume Designer

Liu Shou Hsiang

Action Director

Philip Ng

Production Companies

Sun Entertainment
Culture
Six Doors Film

Productions Limited

A film by Joe Chien

Executive Producers

Chau Cheok Wa
Alex Dong

Cast

Andy
Jessica C
[i.e. Jessica
Cambensy]
Jenny
Michael Wong

Cast

Captain Ma
Terence Yin
Bro Fung
Jack Kao

Wu Ming

teacher
prison warden
Hans Chang
Li Wei
Abby Fung
Nana
Chou Heng Yin

Sister Fung

Sharon Hsu
female courier
Philip Ng
brawler

MC Hot Dog

Tiger, rap singer

Zhang Chi

gangster young
brother

Derek Tsang

David
Candy Yuen
female jailer leader
KB
Bro Adi

In Colour

[2.35:1]
Subtitles

Distributor

Altitude Film
Distribution

Taipei, the present. In the midst of a zombie outbreak. In a high-rise building, Jenny, her boyfriend and his entourage, as well as a mild-mannered teacher and his daughter, are attacked at the same time as a Swat team attempts to take down drug dealers. Only Jenny, the teacher and a police officer survive the onslaught. Taipei is destroyed and the remaining humans move to an underground zone, where some of them are enslaved to participate in death matches with zombies.

A collection of work by animators Mark Baker and Neville Astley: 'The Hill Farm' (1989), 'Living in a Mobile Home' (1985), 'The Village' (1993), 'Jolly Roger' (1998), 'The Big Knights' (1999), 'Peppa Pig' (2009) and 'Ben & Holly's Little Kingdom'

(2012). 'The Hill Farm' and 'The Village', directed by Baker, are standalone films; 'Mobile Home' is a music video made by Astley for the band The Popticians; the other works are episodes from television series for pre-school and young children.

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Home cinema



Drastic surgery: Edith Scob as Christiane in *Eyes Without a Face*

SHOCK AND GORE

Franju's famously idiosyncratic take on the horror genre faces up to disfigurement and blends violence with visual poetry

LES YEUX SANS VISAGE (EYES WITHOUT A FACE)

Georges Franju; France 1960; BFI/Region B Blu-ray and Region 2 DVD; 90 minutes; Certificate 15; 1.66:1; Features: Franju short films *Monsieur et Madame Curie* (1953, 14 mins) and *La Première Nuit* (1958, 20 mins), documentary *Les Fleurs malades de Georges Franju* (2009, 50 mins), interview with Edith Scob (2014), audio commentary by Tim Lucas, booklet

Reviewed by Tony Rayns

Something more than coincidence has to explain why Hitchcock's *Psycho*, Powell's *Peeping Tom*, Kim Kiyoung's *The Housemaid* and Franju's *Eyes Without a Face* appeared almost simultaneously on the cusp of the 1960s. Nobody in Britain was looking at Korean cinema at the time, but the other three films were widely disparaged (not least by *S&S*) as representing descents into distressing grand guignol sensationalism – the

kind of gratuitous nastiness that was simply unacceptable in 'polite' cinema. There were obvious antecedents for the emphases on violent crime and perverse psychology (post-war American noirs, Clouzot's *Les Diaboliques*), but not so many for the visceral shocks or the willingness to show disfigurement and gore. Why did several fine directors in different countries choose to take this step at more or less the same moment?

The BFI's new dual-format edition of *Eyes Without a Face* provides no answer to that question but instead follows the Masters of Cinema edition of Franju's previous feature *La Tête contre les murs* in suggesting that the director is an auteurist case apart. There's no doubt that Franju (1912–87) was a singular figure: a militant atheist and pacifist with strong anti-clerical tendencies, a very committed cinephile (he was one of the founders of the Cinémathèque française in 1936), and a visual poet of the surrealist kind, fascinated by the lines between dream and nightmare, sanity and madness. But he was rarely the originator or writer of his films, and his range is noticeably narrower than Luis Buñuel's, despite their similarities in outlook and temperament.

And Buñuel, of course, became the grandfather of visceral-shock cinema when he sliced a razor through an eyeball in *Un chien andalou*.

Eyes Without a Face, based on a novel published by Fleuve noir, offers an idiosyncratic twist on a generic horror plot. The eminent Dr Genessier (Pierre Brasseur) is a pioneering human-transplant surgeon with dirty secrets: he murders young women in a quest for a face-transplant donor, determined to give his daughter Christiane (Edith Scob) a new face to hide the burns she suffered in a car accident that he caused; he ruthlessly exploits his devoted assistant Louise (Alida Valli), who seeks out and entraps his victims; and he vivisects dogs to test his theories. Cinephile Franju knows that this ground has been trodden before – he must have drawn on memories of Erle Kenton's version of *The Island of Dr Moreau*

The aesthetic is keyed to Scob's face: a vision of angelic purity but also disturbing in its perfection

(*Island of Lost Souls*, 1932) and Ulmer's *The Black Cat* (1934) – but characteristically looks to his idol Louis Feuillade for lessons in anchoring scary fantasy in the mundane routines of everyday life.

The Gaumont 'Making of' documentary included here, *Georges Franju's Flowers of Evil*, traces the Feuillade connection with clips from the serials *Fantomas* (1913) and *Les Vampires* (1915) and makes a decent fist of placing the film in the context of French film production in 1960, even if the 'new wave' initiatives of the time pass virtually unmentioned. (It also, incidentally, renders redundant the unilluminating 17-minute interview with Edith Scob, which repeats everything she says in the documentary but with clunkier editing.) But what makes the set really useful is the inclusion of two of Franju's quota-quickie shorts, the drama-doc *Monsieur et Madame Curie* from 1953 and the dreamy fiction *La Première Nuit* from 1958. Neither is particularly masterly, but both finesse the counterpointing of alternative visions of reality. The Curie film (with Nicole Stéphane as Madame Curie) presents the discovery of radio-active elements in the contexts of (a) family life and (b) the evanescence of all things. *La première Nuit* centres on a privileged 10-year-old boy who dreams of (a) meeting a young girl he's glimpsed and (b) spending the night alone in the Paris Metro, amid night-shift repairmen and ghostly empty trains; at one level it's a documentary about the subway system by night, full of suggestive empty spaces like a de Chirico painting.

Franju uses similar approaches to steer *Eyes* away from conventional melodrama and into his trademark realm of 'anguished poetry', abetted by Maurice Jarre's sinister hurdy-gurdy waltz, which turns up every time Louise hunts for or disposes of a fresh victim. The notorious face-removal scene is not gore-for-gore's-sake but a good example of Franju's determination to make everything as credible as possible – so that the poetry is inextricable from the fidelity to physical and topographical realities. As in several other Franju movies, the aesthetic is keyed to Edith Scob's face: a vision of angelic purity, but also disturbing in its perfection. Franju doesn't set out to transcend the genre, but instead to eliminate its usual stupidities and to heighten its typical moods. Hence the scenes which make it clear that both Genessier and Louise are weighed down by the burden of their inhuman work, and hence, too, the climactic equation of madness with liberation. Probably not a masterpiece in the broader scheme of things but indisputably a genre classic, and as resonant and disquieting as it was 55 years ago.

The BFI disc presents an even better transfer than the old Criterion edition, with exemplary picture quality and sound. Hard to imagine anyone slogging through the asinine commentary, though: when it's not describing what's already visible on screen it's reading out cast filmographies from IMDb or grinding an axe for episodes from *The Twilight Zone*. Almost all European names and titles are mangled (my favourites are "Pierre Brassewer" and "Elky Summer") and Raymond Durgat is described as an "Irish critic"! ☹

New releases

THE ADVENTURES OF GERARD

Jerzy Skolimowski; UK/Italy/Switzerland 1970;

MGM Limited Edition Collection/Region-free

DVD; 92 minutes; 16:9 letterboxed

Reviewed by David Thompson

I distinctly recall Jerzy Skolimowski introducing a BFI retrospective of his work in the early 1980s and referring to *The Adventures of Gerard* as "the worst film ever made". It's certainly not that, but it does feel out of place in his career, and was probably made a lot more for expedience than love.

In the early 1960s, Skolimowski had emerged as one of the shining new talents of Polish cinema, alongside his contemporary Roman Polanski. His films, such as *Walkover* (1965) and *Barrier* (1966), were formally daring and ideologically ambiguous, and revealed a distinctive, poetic sensibility. Unlike Polanski, who soon skipped to the west, Skolimowski stayed to outrage the authorities with *Identification Marks: None* (1966). Between two wonderfully surreal tales of young desire, *Le Départ* (1967), shot in Belgium with Jean-Pierre Léaud, and *Deep End* (1970), filmed in London and Munich, the stateless Skolimowski was tempted into making a high-budget period romp by Polanski's then producer, Gene Gutowski. By his own admission, Skolimowski's English was terrible at this time, and he couldn't follow the script or direct actors in that language with any precision. Not a promising position to be in.

Based on comic short stories by Sir Arthur Conan Doyle, the film focuses on a vainglorious French hussar, Colonel Etienne Gerard, fighting for Napoleon in Spain at the beginning of the 19th century. The emperor – played by Eli Wallach with a false nose – determines that Gerard is so idiotic as to be the ideal carrier of false despatches intended to mislead the British forces under Wellington (a brief role taken by John Neville). Gerard (Peter McEnery, never a strong lead) of course somehow survives all the adversaries he encounters – a suave, decent British officer (Mark Burns), a psychotic renegade (Jack Hawkins) and, above all, the voluptuous



Pre-Pinkie: *Dancing with Crime*

and canny Countess Teresa (Claudia Cardinale). Skolimowski tries hard to build up the humour, with Gerard delivering asides to the camera, speeded-up motion and a few bizarre conceits, but the strenuously unfunny script smothers much hope. Jokes about the British obsessions of tea-drinking and fox-hunting are about as subtle as it gets. The sweaty ambience is very much that of a spaghetti western, with Riz Ortolani's raucous music thundering away at every opportunity. Most credit must go to the work of the great Polish cinematographer Witold Sobocinski, who at least gives the film a certain visual bravura. **Disc:** After years of only pan-and-scan versions being available, it's good to see a satisfactory transfer of the film in its original scope ratio. No extras.

FILMS STARRING RICHARD ATTENBOROUGH

DANCING WITH CRIME

John Paddy Carstairs; UK 1947; Simply Media/

Region 2 DVD; 79 minutes; 1.33:1

JET STORM

Cy Endfield; UK 1959; Simply Media/

Region 2 DVD; 82 minutes; 16:9

Reviewed by Neil Mitchell

Two relatively minor films on the late Lord Attenborough's acting CV – Cy Endfield's proto-Airport disaster movie *Jet Storm* and (released in collaboration with the BFI) John Paddy Carstairs's post-war crime drama *Dancing with Crime* – are here presented in new 2K restorations, with the latter getting its first release for home entertainment in any format. Intriguing rather than essential films, they are largely of interest for showcasing Attenborough in lead roles that straddled his breakthrough performance as Pinkie Brown in *Brighton Rock* (1947).

One cannot help but be reminded of the Boulting Brothers' great film when watching the inferior *Dancing with Crime*, released just months before *Brighton Rock* in October 1947. That's not to say that Carstairs's film, set in the underworld of immediate post-WWII London, isn't without merit; its strongest aspect is its highlighting of the difficulty faced by many soldiers in adjusting to life on civvy street. Attenborough's demobbed, affable and honest cabbie Ted Peters is our guide through the capital's underbelly, populated by various nefarious figures, in a brisk but derivative tale that draws too heavily on the previous decade's American gangster movies.

By the late 1950s Attenborough was an established star of British cinema and he took centre stage in Endfield's ensemble thriller *Jet Storm* as man-on-the-edge Ernest Tilley. The film predated Hollywood's slew of airborne disaster flicks by a good decade and crams in every plot point and character type that would subsequently become clichés of the subgenre. Surrounded by such familiar faces as Stanley Baker, Hermione Baddeley and Harry Secombe, Attenborough dominates proceedings as a revenge-fuelled, grief-stricken would-be bomber aboard a flight from London to New York. Cliques are formed, secrets revealed, tensions rise and moral boundaries are



New releases

↻ examined through Tilley's desperate actions in a somewhat clunky but diverting tale that is primarily significant for its early employment of a narrative framework Hollywood would later exploit to the hilt.

Disc: The excellent 2K restorations make for a crisp picture and clean audio on both releases. Regrettably no extras are included on either disc.

CRUEL STORY OF YOUTH

Oshima Nagisa; Japan 1960; Eureka/Masters of Cinema/Region B Blu-ray and Region 2 DVD Dual Format; Certificate 15; 96 minutes; 2.35:1; Features: Tony Rayns introduction, original theatrical trailer, booklet notes by Audie Bock

Reviewed by Trevor Johnston

After his previous well-received B-picture *A Town of Love and Hope*, Japanese studio Shochiku decided that 28-year-old Oshima Nagisa was ready to spearhead a change of direction for the company, previously associated with the family melodramas of Ozu and others. "Japan's New Wave!" screams the trailer for this youth-gone-wild drama, promising generational conflict, a bit of bare flesh and a refreshing new aesthetic. The film itself, however, shows Oshima's characteristic aversion to simple celluloid formulae as firmly in evidence already, taking hot-button, readily exploitable material including schoolgirl pregnancy, extortion, and prostitution, but adopting a cool-headed, analytic approach to the action in terms of its sociopolitical context.

By 1960, Japan's economy was already sharing the spoils, but civil protests at the government renewal of the US-Japan security treaty suggested that status-quo conformity hadn't yet deadened all dissent. Early on we see undergraduate student Kiyoshi and his high-schooler lover Makoto watch his university pals participating in an anti-US demonstration, yet it's clear these two don't see the point of the exercise but prefer to manifest their rebellion through premarital sex and an ongoing scam where she's used as bait to entrap wealthy middle-aged lechers offering to drive her home late at night.

That discernible ideological dimension to the actions of youngsters avowedly devoid of party convictions is exactly what differentiates Oshima's offering from the run of 'youthquake' flicks being made in the US or UK at the same time, lending rather more substance to its decidedly bleak outlook. Oshima's inference is that by lacking the political will of the previous generation, who had tried and failed to bring change (here represented by the girl's older sister and her lefty doctor ex-boyfriend), this hormonally charged young duo are all revved up with nowhere to go. The startling image of a motorbike being ridden into the sea makes that abundantly clear, while elsewhere a staggering cut from the lovers' heated physical exchange to a churning cement mixer is both a defiant one-finger salute to the Ozu-style pillow shot and an adept metaphor for the distance between these doomed ravers and the new Japan being built for apartment-dwelling salarymen.

Disc: The colours in Shochiku's 2014 4K restoration really pop out on Eureka/Masters of Cinema's Blu-ray transfer – those red umbrellas! That turquoise phone!

– while Tony Rayns's 55-minute filmed introduction offers a phenomenally useful Oshima primer. A superb combination.

HERE IS YOUR LIFE

Jan Troell; Sweden 1966; Criterion/Region A Blu-ray/Region 1 DVD; 168 minutes; 1.66:1; Features: introduction by Mike Leigh, new interviews with Jan Troell, star Eddie Axberg and co-writer/producer Bengt Forslund, 1965 Troell short 'Interlude in the Marshland', essay by Mark Le Fanu

Reviewed by Michael Atkinson

However little seen in the 1960s outside Sweden, and however unremembered in the decades since, Jan Troell's feature debut is one of the New Wave era's mega-*Bildungsroman* epics, a nearly-three-hour mood piece about growing up in the Norrland high country at the beginning of the century. Adapting a three-volume autobiographical novel by eventual Nobel-winner Eyvind Johnson, Troell crystallises the European period's rampaging impressionistic experimentation, but with a focus on nature, idleness and textural realism that became a distinctly Swedish strategy. You just can't help falling in love with cinema's sudden yen for evoking a moment of consciousness by way of sunlight in a girl's hair, or lovers lying in a field, or a fly battling the glass on a paint-chipped windowsill.

Troell's hero Olof is an inarticulate working-class boy we first meet, *in medias res*, glumly departing from a foster home and returning to the house that was too poor and too disease-ridden to keep him. From there, the film is a fluttering ribbon of impressions and experiences, with little or no exposition or context surrounding them, and none required: Olof bops from job to job, from lumberjacking to brickmaking to servicing a pioneering movie theatre to assisting (and bedding) a spirited but ageing carnival floozie with her rifle-range concession. But we understand the passage through in-between details and moments, overheard conversations, dalliances with girls, views from train windows, memories of hard work. (It's a movie of real labour, and you could learn a frontier trade watching it.) Along the way, the watchful but not terribly vocal Olof becomes slowly radicalised, in the WWI years of nascent Bolshevism, democratic socialism and bohemian anarchism, and his politics chop up against his employers in a building crescendo, as Olof matures and

the actor playing him seems to actually age.

Troell throws in every subjective trick in the book: freeze-frames, double exposures, extreme perspectives, cutaway evocations of memories and dreams, elliptical time-jumps and so on. It was shot (by Troell) in lustrous black-and-white when it doesn't burst into hazy colour. (An early ten-minute sequence showing a lumberman's tale of his dead children and mad wife is a particularly extreme detour, encapsulating unmarked memories and perhaps hallucinations within the flashback, all in a disorientating blast of colour.)

Amid the catalogue of pleasures to be picked out of the film's fabric, the use of aboriginal cinema (Olof even works as a barnstorming projectionist) is spellbinding for its own sake and for how it details the character's remoteness from the world, trying to figure out WWI newsreels and studying the oddness of early Danish and Italian melodramas that couldn't be further from life in the near-Arctic hinterlands. If Troell's film suffers from some obvious acting (Max von Sydow and Gunnar Björnstrand show up in hammy bits), its collage-y shape is fabulously seductive, and its place of pride in the evolution of mid-century art film is rock-solid. Without perhaps being seen at all, the film seems to have influenced everyone from Terrence Malick to Miguel Gomes.

Disc: A smash-up Criterion job: grain-perfect digital restoration, the dependable Peter Cowie interviewing a still-youthful Troell, and the inclusion of Troell's hard-to-see short from the Nordic omnibus film *4 x 4* (1965), featuring von Sydow as a brakeman who leaves his train in the middle of the wilderness on a restless impulse, and baffles the locals with his purposeless behaviour.

THE MAGGIE

Alexander Mackendrick; UK 1954; StudioCanal/Region B Blu-ray/Region 2 DVD; Certificate U; 92 minutes; 1.37:1; Features: introduction by Charles Barr, featurette, 'Puffer Ships', trailer

Reviewed by Philip Kemp

The Maggie is the most uneven and least remembered of Alexander Mackendrick's Ealing comedies and, perhaps not coincidentally, the only one of his films on which he took an 'original story' credit. He himself described it as "dealing with problems private to Mackendrick, and that's probably what's



Wild at heart: Oshima Nagisa's *Cruel Story of Youth*

TRUE COLOURS

Glaringly bright televisions rarely show movies as their makers intended. Dedicated film fans, please adjust your sets

By David Mackenzie

I have bad news for you: when you sit down to enjoy DVDs or Blu-rays on your TV or projector, the unfortunate reality is that unless it's been specifically adjusted, your display device is not showing you the correct colours, brightness, texture or motion characteristics of the original content.

With the amount of time and effort spent by the film industries on lighting, designing, photographing, scanning, restoring and colour-grading films, surely severe colour errors should have died out along with analogue NTSC (and to a lesser extent PAL) TV systems? Shouldn't today's digital encoding, playback and display systems allow a filmmaker to define a specific shade of colour in the studio, and be confident that that's how it will play back to us in the home?

In theory, the answer is yes – the pictures seen and intended by the filmmaker in the post-production suite *could* be delivered to everyone with a good level of accuracy. The reasons why they aren't are largely economic and historical. A typical electronics store is a considerably brighter environment than almost any living space (and obviously more so than a darkened cinema). To compete with this level of ambient light (and with competitor products), manufacturers pre-set TVs to produce the most glaringly bright picture possible, even though this results in a race to the bottom in terms of image fidelity.

From a film lover's standpoint, one of the greatest misconceptions peddled by the AV industry is that the owner of a display device should play 'armchair DP' and adjust the picture controls to suit his or her personal preferences, without reference to any kind of standard. In any video system, be it PAL, NTSC, HDTV or UHDTV, there are reference coordinates for the colour of white – which forms the backbone of the image we see – and for each of the primary colours that are laid on top. When the display outputs images in line with these standards, the filmmaker's work appears undistorted. However, by default, display devices do not play by these rules.

In the days of the cathode ray tube, there was a limit to how hard the display could be driven before phosphor burn or other damage resulted. It was therefore in the manufacturers' best interests to use as many tricks as possible to make their TV's image *seem* brighter and more engaging, without actually making it brighter (or raising power consumption). Although LED LCD TVs can effortlessly produce a picture that's bright as well as accurate, the average consumer is now so accustomed to this bright, processed picture that manufacturers are unlikely to stop the practice.



Picture not perfect: colour errors continue even in today's hi-tech display systems

The most obvious way manufacturers 'fake' a 'richer' picture is to crush out shadow and highlight details, producing a higher-contrast look without all the nuances of the original image. Another trick involves skewing the baseline colour of grey towards blue. Although video standards explicitly specify a mostly neutral grey (the colour of which correlates to around 6,500 kelvin), manufacturers instead pre-set displays to have a correlated colour temperature of 9,000-plus kelvin, which appears brighter, once again at the expense of quality. Colour saturation and brightness levels are boosted – often manufacturers will distort other aspects of colour output as well, to add their own 'signature' to the image. Heavy edge enhancement and noise reduction might also be applied – the latter dampens or outright removes the film's natural grain texture. And then there are the 'motion smoothing' features, which make films resemble a TV soap opera.

Here's the good news: most modern displays can be set up to produce a very accurate picture, at no additional expense to the user. Figuring out how to set up the display isn't necessarily easy, but simply selecting the 'Movie' picture mode (or if it has one, the ISF or THX branded mode) will banish many of the most undesirable features. After this, to make sure you're getting the full 1,920 x 1,080 resolution, adjust your television's sharpness control so that edges do not have white glowing outlines added to them. Shut off any noise-reduction systems and

turn off the overscan (edge-cropping) setting, which is usually called 'Just Scan', 'Dot by Dot' or something similar. Also, make sure any dynamic contrast settings – which further second-guess the colourist's work – are switched off. A decent rule of thumb is that any control with a name that sounds marketing-oriented, or with 'auto' in the description, is probably best disabled.

Because consumer televisions are built to an aggressive price point, a generous level of tolerance is usually allowed for individual components. One television might contain a video display panel from Factory A, whereas another, the exact same model, might contain a part from Factory B. The differences are also exacerbated with age: the output characteristics shift, so that even if the manufacturer produced a neutral canvas in the first few hundred hours of the display's life, thousands of hours of run time will have changed the colour further. Rogue disc players, AV receivers and other devices the signal passes through are known to make their own fanciful adjustments to the picture.

A full-scale professional calibration of the kind done in a post-production environment, involves using a colour analyser – the type of device that is used in the fashion industry to make sure two pairs of jeans from two different factories are the same shade of Levi's blue. These measurements are then compared against the HDTV specification document (published as a United Nations telecommunications paper called ITU-Rec.709) using specialised software, and the errors are tuned out. This process usually costs about £300. A professional calibration is vital for anyone making full-scale judgements on this most visual of mediums, but even a basic do-it-yourself calibration is recommended for anyone wishing to see films at home closer to how their makers intended them to be seen. 📺

Manufacturers pre-set their TVs to the most glaringly bright picture possible, even though this damages image fidelity

ENGLAND MADE HIM

The eccentric Richard Massingham was one of the most inventive and instantly recognisable auteurs in 1940s British cinema.

HOW TO BE ECCENTRIC: THE ESSENTIAL RICHARD MASSINGHAM

TELL ME IF IT HURTS/THE FIVE-INCH BATHER/POST EARLY FOR CHRISTMAS/ELOPEMENT IN FRANCE/IN WHICH WE LIVE/COUGHS AND SNEEZES/DOWN AT THE LOCAL/AN ENGLISHMAN'S HOME/POOL OF CONTENTMENT/PEDAL CYCLISTS/WATCH YOUR METERS/JET-PROPELLED GERMS/PEDESTRIAN CROSSING/WHAT A LIFE/ANOTHER CASE OF POISONING/HANDKERCHIEF DRILL/30 MILES AN HOUR/WARNING TO TRAVELLERS/THE CURE/HELP YOURSELF/MOVING HOUSE/INTRODUCING THE NEW WORKER

UK 1934-51; BFI/Region 2 DVD; 170 minutes total; 1.37:1. Features: booklet

Reviewed by Michael Brooke

At a time when popular magazines were swooning over the likes of Stewart Granger and Margaret Lockwood, a far less probable film star emerged in the form of a bearishly built, balding, jowly middle-aged man with a range of facial expressions – he rarely spoke – rivalling that of any silent comedian. Magazines such as *Photoplay* may never have put Richard Massingham (1898-1953) on their covers (or anywhere else), but there's little doubt that during the 1940s his was one of British cinema's most instantly recognisable faces, even if few could put a name to it. The front man of a series of typically brief, wildly inventive public information films (PIFs), Massingham was usually lectured by a peremptory offscreen presence, his hangdog face showing a resigned expression of mute obedience as he demonstrated the finer points of crossing the road, maintaining personal hygiene or coping with war-enforced material deprivations. Endlessly quoted and YouTubed, Massingham's films remain highly visible to this day.

But what this fascinating and long-overdue collection underscores is that Massingham was also a minor but genuine British cinema auteur. This isn't a term he himself would recognise, as he died just before it took root in French cinephile circles, but although he only appears in a dozen of the films on this disc (discounting blinkworthy bit parts) and directed just 13 (John Krish, Michael Law, Michael Orrom and John Waterhouse also called the shots), every one is as surely *unfilm* de Richard Massingham as if he'd personally signed each frame. His medical background, overlapping employment as a doctor at the London Fever Hospital with the first few years of his filmmaking career, shows through in a recurring fascination with disease and discomfort (*Jet-Propelled Germs*, *Another Case of Poisoning*) and medical terminology and paraphernalia (*Tell Me If It Hurts*, *The Cure*). Similarly, his comedic

inclinations often veer towards violent slapstick (the montage of humiliations at the start of *Coughs and Sneezes*), coupled with an eye for surreal incongruity and a cinematic sensibility generously fuelled by German expressionism and Soviet montage, both influences well to the fore in his confident amateur debut *Tell Me If It Hurts*, about a routine visit to the dentist.

Massingham's fondness for already obsolete silent-cinema tropes turns him into a kindred spirit of Guy Maddin, perhaps the only other filmmaker who would conceivably close a routine commercial urging people to *Post Early for Christmas* with a bizarre image of its protagonist's hand become talon-like by strapping five lit candles to each of his fingers. The films can be equally eccentric verbally, as demonstrated by the control-freak paterfamilias of *Moving House* (Kynaston Reeves) attempting to curb his children's excesses with a faltering "Come back! Your adhesive numbers! Come back!"

This compilation sensibly eschews a crude chronological survey in favour of grouping Massingham's output under five themed headings: 'Dr Massingham Says' (medical/health films), 'Surviving the War' (1942-44 titles), 'An Englishman's Home' (which, naturally, includes the pubs surveyed in the affectionate *Down at the Local*), and the two-part 'Post-War Blues': 'What a Life!' and 'The Daily Grind'. A dozen of the films run two minutes

Massingham's fondness for already obsolete silent-cinema tropes turns him into a kindred spirit of Guy Maddin

or less, but it's the longer ones that offer a more rounded portrait of both Massingham himself and recurring preoccupations that may not always have been dictated by the public bodies that commissioned his films. Often, an idealised vision will be undermined by pesky reality, with *Introducing the New Worker's* eager-beaver office boy encountering a situation of workplace apathy that the bulk of the film's audience would have found all too familiar. Because Massingham's films were (mostly) intentionally funny, he could get away with holding a mirror up to his audience's own lives in a way that government-backed propaganda films more usually shied away from. In particular, despite the COI funding, the mournful *What a Life* (there's no onscreen exclamation mark) comes across as an anguished *cri de coeur* as its protagonists (one, of course, played by Massingham himself) contemplate suicide as the most fitting solution to post-war austerity.

This single-DVD release only compiles a quarter or so of Massingham's output, but most of the classics are present and correct, although James Quandt's booklet essay namechecks some tantalising-sounding others. Some have appeared on earlier BFI and Network documentary/PIF compilations, but no Massingham compilation worth its salt could ignore *The Five-Inch Bather*, *Coughs and Sneezes*, *Pedestrian Crossing* and *What a Life*. The films have mostly not been restored, and some are more visibly damaged than others, but everything is at least watchable and often considerably better than that.

A packed 34-page booklet includes an introductory essay, biography, individual notes on all the films, and a reminder that Massingham once wrote for this very magazine. 



The informer: Richard Massingham (right) in *What a Life*

New releases

wrong with it". At the time of its release, with the Ealing brand settling into its reputation for 'cosiness', many reviewers found it loveable and endearing; more recently it's been attacked (especially by Scottish critics) for the sentimental and patronising view of the Scots, often summed up as 'kailyardry'.

In his introduction, Charles Barr disputes this view. But even at the time there were those who saw through the 'funny little old boat versus hardnosed American efficiency' surface of the story to something tougher and less forgiving. An American airline executive, Calvin B. Marshall (Paul Douglas), needs to transport household goods from Glasgow to his newly bought holiday home in the Isles. Thanks to a series of misunderstandings, these are loaded on to a ramshackle old puffer boat, and all Marshall's attempts to retrieve them are foiled by the crew.

US reviewers were, if anything, even more charmed than their British counterparts; the *New York Times* saw *The Maggie* as "a jolly entertainment... as bracing as the Hebridean air". It was left to a reader of *Time* magazine to read a more bitter allegory into it: "That's America in Europe: taken for our money, cheated, fooled, our advice ignored, our skills wasted, our intentions sneered at..." Mackendrick concurred, noting that both he and his screenwriter, William Rose, were American-born and that "the savagely unfair way in which [Marshall] is treated, the sly insult added to injury... were, for us, part of the flavour of the joke."

Disc: Another fine crisp restoration from StudioCanal. A rambling chat about puffer boats from Nick Walker, founder of the Puffer Restoration Trust, doesn't add much.

PICKUP ON SOUTH STREET

Samuel Fuller; USA 1953; Eureka/Masters of Cinema/Region B Blu-ray and Region 2 DVD Dual Format; Certificate PG; 80 minutes; 1.37:1; Features: Kent Jones interview, Samuel Fuller introduction, François Guérif interview, original theatrical trailer, booklet essays by Fuller and Murielle Joudet

Reviewed by Trevor Johnston

Anyone under the impression that this mid-to-late *noir* is likely to be hamstrung by its red-scare politics is doing Fuller's wonderful movie a disservice. Yes, pickpocket Richard Widmark finds his nifty fingers in possession of a top-secret microfilm, but then all the international espionage stuff is as significant here as it is in, say, *North by Northwest* – it keeps the plot moving, but the real interest's elsewhere. As a three-time offender, Widmark knows he's facing life if he's collared again, allowing the narrative to put its foot on the throat of characters already struggling to stay one step up from the gutter. More so than any other Hollywood filmmaker of the time, Fuller knows and understands this seedy subculture. Widmark's steely thief, Thelma Ritter's canny informant (hiding behind a tie-selling operation) and under-appreciated Jean Peters's good-time girl – clinging to her commie agent boyfriend, otherwise the street beckons – take centre stage, where other mainstream thrillers would have them as local colour while the brave cop or detective saves the day. Instead, Fuller is simply fascinated by their code of

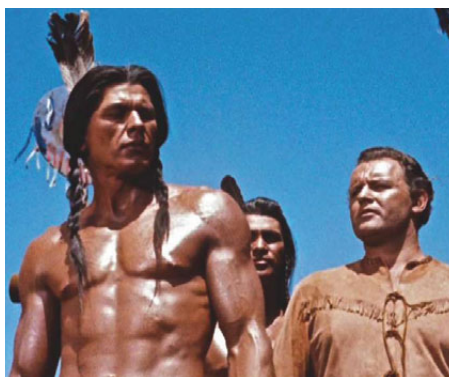


Kiss me deadly: *Pickup on South Street*

survival, where the shared understanding that money talks louder than friendship, sentiment or scruples is like a bond of brotherhood.

All Fuller needs is a few authentic-looking studio settings, including Widmark's memorable dock-front hideout, and he's off into a super-tight 80 minutes, keeping up the tension by pressing his camera right into his performers' sweaty, stressed faces, conveying the unyielding everyday graft they're up against. Then, when it all boils over, Fuller pulls way back, showing the atrocity of violence in tellingly upsetting full-frame. There's an instinctive mastery in the film's formal impact, yet somehow the greater intimacy of this impeccable new Blu-ray transfer also reveals a surprising emotional quotient. Widmark's attraction to Peters is obvious when they lock eyes as he fingers her handbag, but he knows she feigns desire for a living... until the realisation there's genuine feeling involved. As Widmark clocks just for a moment the possibility that love exists in their marginalised, pitiless universe, it's lump-in-the-throat time. Top-five Fuller for sure.

Disc: A revealing Blu-ray transfer effectively shows the fine beads of sweat on every brow and brings up Leigh Harline's edgy *noir*-meets-Stravinsky score to telling effect. Admirable supplements include a perceptive Kent Jones intro, plus the inimitable Fuller represented in archive video from 1982 and a booklet excerpt from his posthumously published memoir *A Third Face*.



Only the brave: *Run of the Arrow*

RUN OF THE ARROW

Samuel Fuller; USA 1957; Warner Archive/Region 1 DVD NTSC; 86 minutes; 16:9

Reviewed by Michael Atkinson

One of three characteristic films Sam brought seethingly to existence in 1957, this overboiled western has previously been available only via junky public-domain DVD packages; Warner's release comes fresh, its blood vessels popping, from an archive print.

As always, Fuller is chomping into big socio-historical issues and painting them with vivid primary colours: Rod Steiger is a Johnny Reb soldier so incensed by the south's surrender, ending the Civil War, that he first considers shooting General Robert E. Lee at Appomattox and then discards the United States altogether, heads west and becomes an honorary Sioux. The resistant personality's outsider rage is given a full airing here; as conflict breaks out between the Sioux and the encroaching US cavalry, and Steiger's petulant Irish lug is recruited as a reluctant scout by the same northerners he'd earlier been trying to kill, so is the issue of just what exactly this portly, Method-y white guy is, caught as he is between identities in a battleground of warring tribalism.

Fuller doesn't demonise either the Sioux or the army; only rogue individuals, prizing their bitterness above the good of the many, breach the peace. The fantastic, almost Martian landscapes (actually Utah), shot in patient panoramas and with a Technicolor grain that feels on the verge of explosion, rub up uneasily against Fuller's trademarked, unintentionally ironic artificiality, which has Jay C. Flippen as an old Sioux, Charles Bronson striking near-naked poses as a muscly chieftain, Spanish actress Sarita Montiel dubbed entirely by Angie Dickinson, and Ralph Meeker doing a Heston-esque bastard as the Custer-like Yankee that Steiger's lost man shoots not once but twice. But mostly it has Steiger, possibly the oddest protagonist in a Hollywood western ever, hulking around in long-sleeve buckskin and dub-mumbling, impossible to resist but harder to believe.

For every stroke of pulpy unreality, there are Fullerian set pieces you can't deny, including an alarming quicksand scene and possibly the most harrowing and bloodthirsty Indian siege ever seen in a studio film. (Famously, this was the first film to use bullet squibs.) Robustly contradictory in the classic Fuller mode, it's a must for completists.

Disc: Pungent transfer of a luridly shot master, with no extras.

THE TOWN THAT DREADED SUNDOWN

Charles B. Pierce; USA 1976; Eureka/Masters of Cinema Region B Blu-ray and Region 2 DVD Dual Format; Certificate 15; 90 minutes; 2.35:1; Features: trailers for both the original and the 2014 remake, interviews with stars Andrew Prine and Dawn Wells and director of photography James Roberson, audio commentary with historians Justin Beaham and Jim Presley, booklet featuring new writing by critic Mike Sutton, reproductions of original Sundown ephemera

Reviewed by Kim Newman

Made by Texan independent Charles B. Pierce, this 1976 exploitation true-crime movie tells the story of a murderer known as 'the

Television

BARETTA

US 1974-78; FabulousFilms/Region 2 DVD; Certificate 12; 612 minutes; 1.33:1.

Reviewed by Robert Hanks

Stephen J. Cannell was one of American primetime's more interesting auteurs – director, producer, prolific writer, a thoroughly commercial operator but one whose stamp is recognisable in pretty much everything he worked on – though that may be another way of saying that he didn't have a huge creative range: cops and action, plots running on a sense of injustice (he liked heroes who had been wrongly imprisoned for something) and a jokey undertone. The high point of his career was co-creating *The Rockford Files* with Roy Huggins; the low point – well, there you have more of a choice: *Hunter*? *Renegade*? *The A-Team*?

Baretta is arguably his most typical and most eccentric creation. Even in outline it sounds odd: a cop show about a street-smart Italian-American undercover detective with a pet cockatoo that does tricks and a penchant for wearing heavy disguises. But the real strangeness is in the comic-sentimental tone, not far removed from late Marx Brothers, with added dope-pushers and beatings. In the pilot episode *Baretta* (Robert Blake) proposes marriage to his girlfriend, who refuses and adds (daringly for US TV in the mid-70s), "Let's just live together. And if we like, we'll stay. And if we don't..." *Baretta* interrupts: "If we don't, I'm a-gonna kill ya, cos there ain't nobody else gonna getcha." She answers with a melting look, and they kiss. And a few minutes later she's shot dead by mob heavies mad at *Baretta* for breaking up their numbers racket, and he sets out for revenge. It was a replacement for an earlier show, *Toma*, based on a real-life New Jersey undercover detective, which was cancelled because, it is said, it was too violent. But *Baretta* still has some edge – one episode is bleak about the effect of heroin on an unborn child, and *Baretta*'s main informant, Rooster (Michael D. Roberts), is apparently a gay pimp.

Cannell certainly supplied some of the odd tone (the resemblance to *Rockford* is noticeable), but not all of it. Blake is a strange actor – just how strange, only David Lynch seems to have really grasped, when he cast him as the Mephistophelean mystery man in *Lost Highway*: utterly artificial, a figure rather than a character. Here, he is meant to be a regular guy, brought up on the streets, someone who can talk to the hustlers and the deadbeats because he's one of them; his friends are exotic dancers, junkies, the poor and the crazy. He's tough – Blake is a plausible ex-fighter – but has something resembling boyish charm, with shy smile, halting eloquence, vaguely Method-ish hesitation and mumbling. Then he goes undercover: nylon wig, rosy accent and broad ethnic stereotype, and lo, he's a Mexican beggar, a little old lady, a Chicago gangster on the lam, a Texan rodeo rider, a Latino boxer ('Chi Chi Rodriguez'), a hippy ('Ziggy Rainbow'); he even, Gawd help us, does blackface. Are these sequences intended as acting masterclasses or comic relief? Is Blake a minor-league Brando, a Dick Emery *manqué*, or – *pace* the Emmy he won for this – just a terrible actor? Not knowing doesn't spoil the fun.



Wolcott The fantastically charismatic George Harris plays Winston Wolcott, the first black CID officer, who has to deal with racism and corruption in the force.

Dave Grusin's Latin funk theme ('Keep Your Eye on the Sparrow') is terrific. Later seasons had a Sammy Davis Jr vocal version; I prefer the instrumental.

Disc: Clean transfer, no extras.

WOLCOTT

Colin Bucksey; UK 1981; Network/Region B Blu-ray/Region 2 DVD; Certificate 15; 194 minutes. Features: stills gallery.

Reviewed by Robert Hanks

At the time, *Wolcott* made a splash – apparently the first mini-series on British TV, its four episodes broadcast over three consecutive nights in January 1981, and the first British *policier* with a black protagonist – before sinking like a stone. It was never repeated: after the riots in Brixton and Toxteth that summer, its picture of police racism must have seemed unpleasantly close to the bone; and even now, its frank use of racial epithets seems startlingly raw.

George Harris plays Winston Wolcott, an ambitious, intelligent constable in the Metropolitan Police promoted to become the first black CID officer. He has to deal with racism and corruption in the force (Christopher Ellison, pre-*The Bill*, as a corrupt DI); suspicion from the black community (the splendid Hugh Quarshie as a leftish youth worker) the attentions of the

media (Christine Lahti's reporter/love interest); and old-fashioned drug-pushing and gang violence (Warren Clarke as a Bob Hoskinsish old school villain, Raul Newney as the subtler black opposition). The self-reliance that enables Wolcott to cope shades believably into an arrogance that puts him at odds with practically everyone.

The acting is by and large a treat – Harris is a fantastically charismatic lead; there are enjoyable cameos by a clutch of up-and-coming alternative comics: Alexei Sayle, Keith Allen and, as a racist plod, Rik Mayall. (Advance publicity for this release has played up his importance: he's on screen for maybe a minute.) It's sociologically interesting, too, to see what are now achingly hip areas of Hackney pre-gentrification, before pie and mash shops were tarts up as East End heritage (shot, incidentally, by Roger Deakins). The American writers, Patrick Carroll and Barry Wasserman, bring an awareness of the interaction of policing and politics rarely found in British cop dramas, even if the detail is not always convincing. The sexual politics have dated worse than the racial; towards the end, the plot feels rushed and illogical. But it's still a very welcome rediscovery.

Disc: Sharp and clear. Oh, how it cries out for some contextualising interviews or commentary.

New releases

 Phantom' who assaulted and killed couples in cars in Texarkana, on the Texas-Arkansas border, in the 1940s. Just as the Phantom's crimes prefigured the killing sprees of Zodiac and Son of Sam, Pierce's community-focused film is a rough sketch for the movies David Fincher and Spike Lee later made about those cases.

It opens with a long, narrated section about life in Texarkana just after World War II, and shows Pierce being ambitious (under the influence of *The Last Picture Show*?) when it comes to the period recreation of cars, clothes and decor (though a few of the haircuts are 70s giveaways). The plot is carried by cops, with Ben Johnson adding gravitas as 'legendary' Texas Ranger Captain J.D. Morales and Andrew Prine earnest as his local sidekick – though the procedural business is sidetracked by purportedly humorous shtick about dimwit officers and a dubious comedy sequence in which husky cops drag up to act uselessly as decoys. The major comedy cop is 'Sparkplug', played with a thick layer of ham and too little actual comedy by Pierce himself.

Tipped into this good ol' boy business are proto-slasher scenes of the sack-hooded Phantom (stuntman Bud Davis) terrorising and killing folks. In the most extraordinary sequence, he attacks tunelessly with a knife at the end of a trombone slide, but he also uses a plain old gun (a rare slasher-movie weapon). In a sustained sequence, a victim (Dawn Wells) is shot twice in the head, but manages to get away from the killer and survive. The fact that the Phantom was never caught gives Pierce a problem he addresses by having a chase climax involving a train, which involves a near-miss... and then a sensationalist tag that warns contemporary audiences the killer might still be out there, waiting to strike again.

Pierce – riding high on the success of his Bigfoot-themed hit *The Legend of Boggy Creek* (1972) – isn't much of a director, and the supporting performances are awkward, but the stalking and killing scenes have a gruesome, matter-of-fact verve that's oddly memorable.

Disc: The useful extras include interviews with Prine, Wells and cinematographer James Roberson, audio commentary by historians Justin Beaham and Jim Presley, and trailers for the original and the 2014 remake/revision..

VARIÉTÉ

E.A. Dupont; Germany 1925; NFP/Region 0 Blu-ray; 95 minutes; 1:33:1; Features: 1926 US release version, booklet

Reviewed by Henry K. Miller

Debuting in Berlin a year after Murnau's *The Last Laugh* (1924) and sharing a studio (Ufa), cinematographer (Karl Freund) and star (Emil Jannings) with that film, *Variété* (1925) once had an almost comparable reputation. Dupont's choice of source material, a popular novel set among the trapeze artists of the Berlin Wintergarten, seems likely to have been heavily informed by the opportunities it provided for Freund to continue his experiments in camera mobility.

Jannings plays an ex-performer and peepshow operator who is seduced by one of his dancers (Lya De Putti) into abandoning his family and returning to the big top. Erotic satisfaction and professional rebirth go hand in hand,



Flirting with trouble: Emil Jannings in *Variété*

but not – as we know from the frame story in which Jannings's character confesses his crimes to a prison governor – for very long. Siegfried Kracauer included it in a cycle of German films in which “the leading character breaks away from the social conventions to grasp life”, only to find himself inevitably forced into “submission or suicide”.

What is most striking now is the film's focus on voyeurism. One scene in which we see a topless acrobat reflected in the opera glasses of her rapt audience is strongly reminiscent of the opening sequence of Hitchcock's debut film *The Pleasure Garden* (1925); others bring to mind *The Ring* (1927), Hitchcock's first film for British International Pictures (where Dupont went on to make *Piccadilly* in 1929). Indeed, in 1939 Hitchcock named *Variété* as one of his ten favourite films, but the resemblances appear to have been coincidental or somehow symptomatic: *Variété* and *The Pleasure Garden* opened in London on the same day in April 1926.

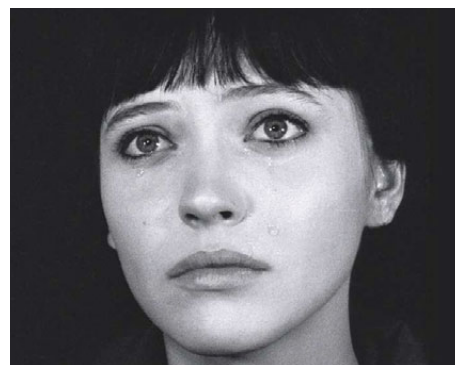
Disc: Restored by the Friedrich-Wilhelm-Murnau-Stiftung and Austrian Filmarchiv, this *Variété* is the closest possible approximation of the version first shown in Germany in 1925, the negative of which is lost. The booklet contains an unusually interesting article on its Frankenstein-like reconstruction from different sources. Also included is the 1926 US version released by Paramount as *Variety*, which is shorter, better edited and, on this disc, given a generic 'silent movie' accompaniment far preferable to the execrable Tiger Lillies score used for the main feature.

VIVRE SA VIE

Jean-Luc Godard, France 1962; BFI/Region B Blu-ray/Region 2 DVD; 84 minutes/1:33:1; Features: audio commentary by Adrian Martin, illustrated booklet with essays, 'In Conversation: Anna Karina and Alistair Whyte' (1973), three early Godard shorts ('Une histoire d'eau', 'Charlotte et son Jules', 'Charlotte et Véronique, ou tous les garçons s'appellent Patrick')

Reviewed by Charlie Fox

“This is our subject,” Jean-Luc Godard announces during the ghoulish rendition of Edgar Allan Poe's ‘The Oval Portrait’ that comes towards *Vivre sa vie*'s tragic close, “a man makes a picture of his wife.” The wife is, of course, Anna Karina and, winter glow undimmed more than half a century later, what a haunting picture it remains. Only for 1985's *Hail Mary* would Godard ever be so



Cry to me: Anna Karina in *Vivre sa vie*

careful again, making this fragile assemblage of scenes, quotations and reflections out of a compulsive need to turn his private anguish (a fast-unravelling marriage) into cinematic art.

Through its 12 discrete sequences Godard follows the drift of an ordinary woman (Karina) into prostitution. If the film is about Karina at her most radiant, its tone and texture are alternately as subdued or jagged as a spurned heart. Every scene acts as an isolated space where a formal experiment occurs; they're closer to wayward inquiries into how a film might be created about an intractable theme (desire, philosophy, cities) than the slabs of narrative they profess to be.

Amid all this theoretical activity, Karina gives her most heart-clutching performance, which seems more like the apparition of a whole unknowable self in all its discreetly shaded moods, stalking through Paris like a cross between Louise Brooks and an exultant cat. So alluring and anarchic, Karina is not just a beautiful muse: a fabulously protean actress whose many transformations for Godard still feel strange and new, at play with the films themselves, mixing giddy abandon with gasping vulnerability. He knew she belonged alongside the magical presences of silent film: their mutual rapture peaks as she witnesses Maria Falconetti in Dreyer's *The Passion of Joan of Arc* (1928) and responds with two lonely tears. It means everything that Godard sets this moment of ecstatic revelation (where else?) in the cinema.

Disc: Blasting its fuzzy Nouveaux Pictures predecessor into rightful obscurity, this restored print is a wonder, with every frame as lustrous as a Brassai snapshot. A superb haul of extras: an illuminating 1972 interview with Karina about her career; commentary, and three early shorts, including 1958's *Une histoire d'eau* (previously uncollected on a Region 2 disc), a grinning shaggy-dog story about a Zazie-like gamine's attempt to circumnavigate a flooded Paris with her boyfriend. Co-directed with Truffaut, it's an improvisatory cavort decorated with screwball gags and literate hijinks.

Godard was obsessive about achieving unprecedented realism with *Vivre sa vie*'s sound design, and now it seems newly bristling with detail. There's also an audio recording from a 1968 event where the director was scheduled yet failed to appear (the kiss-off telegram is reproduced in the booklet), commencing with the doomed words: “I've just spent three days trying to find Godard in Paris...” 

Lost and found

GIRL STROKE BOY

OVERLOOKED FILMS CURRENTLY UNAVAILABLE ON UK DVD OR BLU-RAY

The arrival of an androgynous 'girlfriend' throws a middle-class couple into chaos in this early exploration of LGBT issues

By Alex Davidson

"It's difficult to see how [it] ever got made. It was one of the most stupid films I have seen. A one-word description would be 'putrid'... it disgusted me. Seeing men kissing each other and making love is not my idea of entertainment."

Although this review from the long-extinct *Evening News* is an extreme example, *Girl Stroke Boy* (1973), a comedy about Lettice (Joan Greenwood) and George (Michael Hordern), a middle-aged mother and father who are thrown into confusion when their son brings home a partner they can't identify as female or male, was not liked by contemporary critics. Aside from a few late-night TV screenings and a showing at the 1999 London Lesbian & Gay Film Festival, it is seldom discussed. Its rejection is surprising, given its value as a capsule of contemporary attitudes towards LGBT people, released four years after the Sexual Offences Act partially legalised male homosexual sex.

It's based on the play *Girlfriend* by David Percival, which had a short West End run starring Margaret Leighton and Alan MacNaughton as the parents. Unlike the play, the androgynous character of Jo in *Girl Stroke Boy* is from the West Indies, and is played by Jamaican actor Peter Straker (coily credited by just his surname in the film, to play up the ambiguity). It was directed by Bob Kellett, who made the *Up* film series starring Frankie Howerd, and the screenplay was co-written by Ned Sherrin.

The decision to bring race into the drama can be read as a response to *Guess Who's Coming to Dinner* (1967). In that stiff, careful film, Spencer Tracy and Katharine Hepburn play middle-class white parents whose smug existence is rattled when their daughter brings home a black fiancé (Sidney Poitier). A happy ending is achieved after Tracy delivers a long, patronising speech about tolerance. *Girl Stroke Boy* goes any notion of political correctness – Lettice especially is openly appalled, George's speech at the end is utterly British in its clumsiness, and the 'happy' ending comes about only because the mother ultimately believes that Jo is biologically female – Lettice hasn't learnt or grown a jot.

Girl Stroke Boy scorns bourgeois hypocrisy. Before Jo shows up, Lettice makes great show of her supposedly liberal attitudes ("On the colour question, I am a pioneer", she booms to a friend). Throw in the possibility that her son may be queer, however, and her prejudice is unmasked. Greenwood has a lot of fun with her character, helping even the duff jokes to land. Hordern is excellent as the beleaguered father, ultimately wanting everyone to be happy



Guess who's coming to dinner: Peter Straker (right) as Jo in *Girl Stroke Boy*

The queers get off much more lightly than the straight characters, who are weak, snide or prejudiced

and unable to regurgitate his wife's objections because he doesn't share them. He's endlessly endearing, fumbling his way to acceptance through an inarticulate stream of consciousness: "I don't give a damn if she's a man. If she is, she's a jolly good chap." Straker, a veteran of the original London production of *Hair*, gets better as the film develops, taking Jo from stilted politeness to wild exasperation as the character gets more agency. Sadly, the film wastes the talents of Rudolph Walker and Elisabeth Welch, seen in a short sequence as Jo's parents.

The early 1960s depictions of LGBT characters in British cinema could be sympathetic, as in

A Taste of Honey (1961), *The L-Shaped Room* (1962) and, most famously, *Victim* (1961). After partial legalisation in 1967, however, more barbed portrayals were reappearing, such as the joyless French co-production *Staircase* (1969), starring Richard Burton and Rex Harrison. In *Girl Stroke Boy*, thankfully, the queers get off much more lightly than the straight characters, who are weak, snide or prejudiced. The cisgender female characters come off worst – Lettice is mean-spirited and cowardly, while Patricia Routledge's supporting role is a provocative gossip.

If queer characters were rare on British cinemas, trans characters – which, today, would be how many viewers would read the character of Jo – were almost non-existent (although 1972 saw the release of *I Want What I Want*, a worthy drama with a hysterical ending starring Anne Heywood as a man who transitions to female). If Jo is androgynous, then Laurie, the son played by Clive Francis, borders on asexual. He has never had a partner, we learn, and when gossiping to a friend Lettice describes him as a "poor, sad virgin", while Jo thoughtlessly refers to his occasional impotence. Laurie and Jo are a genuinely queer couple, and a real rarity in British cinema.

When I worked in the BFI curatorial unit, I wanted to programme *Girl Stroke Boy* for the BFI Mediatheques but ended up in a rightsholder labyrinth. I eventually found it on a bootleg DVD of sub-VHS quality. Its sexual politics are hugely dated – the notion of trans people is beyond its comprehension. But it's such a curious film with so much potential that, despite its flaws, it well deserves another twirl in the spotlight. 📺

WHAT THE PAPERS SAID



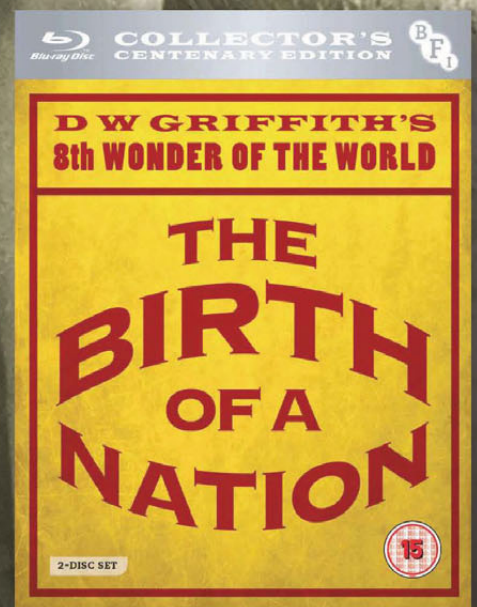
'The films's one constant pleasure is in the expertly polished performances of Joan Greenwood and Michael Hordern... Their [characters] attempts at diplomatic curiosity are often quite irresistible.'
David McGillivray
'Monthly Film Bulletin',
September 1977



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Informing, educating and entertaining: the BBC has always steered a line between populism and exclusivity, but no longer seems so sure how to do this

THE VENERABLE BEEB

THIS NEW NOISE

The Extraordinary Birth and Troubled Life of the BBC

By Charlotte Higgins, Guardian Books/Faber, 274pp, £12.99, ISBN 9781783350728

Reviewed by Robert Hanks

The BBC has had some jittery times over the last few years, regularly generating headlines about scandals, real or manufactured, involving Jimmy Savile, executive pay, political bias, racism (usually but not always featuring Jeremy Clarkson), ageism, sexism... The jitters reached a new pitch in the aftermath of May's general election, when in the space of a few

weeks the Corporation suffered successive shocks: a new culture secretary known for his hostility to the BBC, a green paper setting out the terms of a "root and branch" review of the Corporation's purpose, funding and governance, and the imposition of the expense of free television licences for the elderly – in effect, a £750 million budget cut. This last was the most startling, because it was done without consulting either parliament or the BBC Trust, and because the BBC's management capitulated so swiftly and completely: the coalition government had mooted a similar plan in October 2010 but abandoned it when the board of the Trust threatened mass resignation.

Amid the panic, *This New Noise* is a useful primer on how we got here, tracing the BBC's

history from its origins and peering anxiously into the digital future. Charlotte Higgins's book began as a series of articles for the *Guardian*, commissioned in the autumn of 2013, and its origins show. On the one hand, Higgins has a journalistic attentiveness to the reader's requirements, so that while she packs in inordinate amounts of information – with much delving in the archives and many interviews with leading players in the BBC's recent history – her writing remains graceful and engaging. This is also very clearly a *Guardian* book, socially liberal but with statist sympathies, and at times more nostalgic and consolatory than polemically rigorous. It is journalistic in frustrating ways, too – episodic, with arguments underdeveloped and chapters that coalesce around personalities

more than themes. An early chapter gets derailed by the passionate correspondence between Hilda Matheson, the BBC's first director of talks, and Vita Sackville-West, so that it reads more like a proposal for a biography than part of this book: I'd buy the biography.

You might argue, though, that the incoherence shows how deeply Higgins has absorbed her subject. The most important lesson she offers is how contingent the BBC is: its structures and sense of purpose owe nothing to logic, everything to technological happenstance, outsized personalities and historical accident. The British Broadcasting Company was founded, and awarded a monopoly on broadcasting, as a response to a technical problem – the scarcity of radio wavelengths, and the threat of commercial stations interfering with maritime or military uses; the licence fee was a pragmatic answer to the question, who pays? The BBC's first managing director, John Reith, was an outlandish blend of ignoramus and genius, pragmatist and zealot. Having talked his way into the job, he spent several days dropping the word 'broadcast' into conversation in the hope that somebody would tell him what it meant; he thought a suitable question for a job candidate was, "Do you accept the teachings of Jesus Christ?" But he endowed the BBC with a mission, to inform, educate and entertain, but also to embody the nation's sense of itself. World War II confirmed the BBC's place at the heart of modern British life, and its status abroad as the best possible advertisement for the nation (a status that successive Conservative governments seem to have misunderstood or ignored).

It is as well to recognise that little about the BBC is sacred, and that nothing has any intrinsic logic – the licence fee, for example

Since the war years, successive political crises and technological shifts have confused rather than clarified things – the BBC has always steered between populism and exclusivity, but now seems less sure how to do this; it is not clear how imperatives and habits developed in the age of mass media can or should be transferred to the narrowcast digital age. It is as well to recognise that little about the BBC is sacred, and that nothing has any intrinsic logic – the licence fee, for example. At the same time, the BBC's critics need to recognise how robust and flexible these ad hoc structures have been over the near-century it has existed, allowing the BBC to maintain its position as a unifying national institution and, elsewhere, a supreme instrument of soft power.

Higgins ends on a note of uncertainty and pleading, likening the BBC to the church and quoting Matthew Arnold on the sea of faith, with its melancholy, long, withdrawing roar. But the uncertainty seems to have as much to do with the scale of the subject as with genuine fears for the future: the BBC, like the sea, is very hard to grasp. ☉

FANTASIA OF COLOR IN EARLY CINEMA

By Tom Gunning, Giovanna Fossati, Joshua Yumibe and Jonathon Rosen; Amsterdam University Press; 288pp; €34.95; ISBN 9789089646576

Reviewed by Bryony Dixon

There are certain books you like to have lying about on your desk because they are so attention-grabbing. This is one of those. A beautiful, indulgent, interesting celebration and examination of colour in early film, reproducing individual high-resolution frame stills, thought-provokingly grouped in loose themes: 'the dream', 'fairyland', 'voyage', 'metamorphosis' and 'fancy'. It's a highly designed book. The slow contemplation of individual frames alters our sense of time in relation to these films and we are further invited to storyboard our own narratives from the frames and explore the "flow of associations that express the wonder of colour in early moving images".

There are in addition four essays that examine in detail the technical history of early colouring of film, the early media context for the films, restoration issues and a personal reaction by the book's designer, Jonathon Rosen. There is also a useful filmography of all the films from which frames were reproduced from the archives of the EYE Film Institute Netherlands, by EYE's silent film expert Elif Rongen-Kaynakçi.

Joshua Yumibe, a film historian whose aim is to "delineate color's cinematic horizon in the early 20th century", lucidly explains the various types of colouring in use during the early film era – hand colour, stencilling and tinting and toning – in the context of the technical developments that underpinned them, including newly developed aniline dyes with lovely names such as 'Mauvine'. His thesis is that these are not a primitive attempt at the undreamed-of colouring systems of today, but rather, as he puts it: "The images in this book represent a technical highpoint in film coloring, a fact that may be surprising given that they were created over a century ago, well before the Technicolor wonders of *The Wizard of Oz* and

Gone with the Wind... though related, the fantasia of today is still not exactly the same as it was then, for the colors of the fantastic are embedded deeply within the media culture of their time."

Tom Gunning further explores the fascinating aesthetic context of colour systems from all kinds of visual media – notably photography and theatre design but also books and illustration. He waxes lyrical about the qualities of colour: "It shimmers on surfaces or stains things deeply... in a sense ungraspable and yet also unforgettable." Of course, the qualities of colour, elusive as they are in the mind's eye, echo qualities held by the time-based forms film and music and therefore perhaps have a natural affinity with them. None of these forms are easy to describe in words, so a book dominated by pictures is a great way to express the relationship between colour and film.

I'm a big fan of film picture books – they are some of the most well-thumbed on my shelves – and, like Tom Gunning, my interest in film was piqued as a youngster by a book of film stills and frames: his was Paul Rotha's *Movie Parade* from 1934, mine was Liam O'Leary's *Silent Cinema*. Let's hope that *Fantasia of Color in Early Film* will inspire another generation. EYE archivist Giovanna Fossati hopes so too: "Against the current trend of making a large amount of films accessible in small formats online (typical of platforms such as YouTube) the appreciation of the single still frame reproduced at very high resolution by digitally scanning the original artifact is, in my view yet another possibility offered by the transition from analog to digital technology."

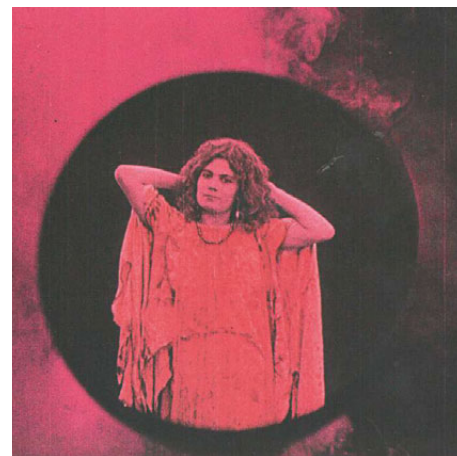
But the final verdict should come from the foreword by Martin Scorsese, whose joy in the book is palpable: "I could gaze at these images for hours. They are as fascinating as illuminated manuscripts or magic lantern slides. And each one, isolated from the greater whole of which it was originally a part, offers us a sublime miniature world in which a thousand and one stories are about to take place."

Just so. It's staying on my desk. ☉

The slow contemplation of individual frames alters our sense of time in relation to these films



Les Tulipes, 1907 – hand-coloured, stencilled



Physique diabolique, 1912 – hand-coloured, tinted

THE BIRTH OF A NATION

By Paul McEwan, BFI Film Classics/Palgrave, 96pp, £12.99, ISBN 9781844576579

Reviewed by Pamela Hutchinson

Indisputably a classic, but undoubtedly in need of context and interpretation, *The Birth of a Nation* is a prime candidate for the BFI Film Classics treatment. While it's a surprise that D.W. Griffith's 1915 landmark film hasn't already been featured in the series, Paul McEwan's monograph proves to be worth the wait.

It's comfortable, but misleading, to consider this film's cinematic achievements and its abhorrent message separately: either to herald it as a Civil War epic that advanced the practice of narrative filmmaking, or dismiss it as horribly outdated hate speech. Crucially, McEwan insists on the more productive angle of tackling both artistry and meaning together. Thus he crisply concludes the "art-or-racism argument" early on, labelling *The Birth of a Nation* "a racist work of art in a racist culture" at the outset. McEwan makes a subtle but useful distinction between the racist message of the film's source material, Thomas Dixon's play and novel *The Clansman*, and Griffith's own reasons for adapting them. Dixon was writing with a political aim, and taking aim at miscegenation in particular, whereas Griffith meant "to tell a story of peace and brotherhood, even if it was built on a foundation of white supremacy".

The fact is that nothing Griffith did in *The Birth of a Nation* was accidental – so it's fundamentally unhelpful to ignore the reasons for his choices, however unpleasant. Equally it's tricky, 100 years on, for audiences to know how to respond to this film. McEwan acknowledges, as a book of this kind should, that there are moments in the film when the



'A racist work of art in a racist culture': *The Birth of a Nation*

natural interpretation of a modern viewer will be completely at odds with Griffith's intention. One white character refusing to shake the hand of a mixed-race man was expected to inspire a nod of admiration; another telling the same man, "You are the equal of any man here" would mark him out as a dangerous villain. Sickening as those acts of double-think are, this book will prove invaluable for first-time viewers, as well as providing deeper analysis for those more familiar with the film.

McEwan is alert too when discussing the impact of the film. He repudiates the idea that President Woodrow Wilson endorsed *The Birth of a Nation*, casting aside the oft-repeated claim that he ever said the film was "like writing history with lightning". More importantly, he refutes a causal link between the film's release and the resurgence of the Ku Klux Klan – though Klan chapters did attempt to piggyback on the publicity

Nothing Griffith did in 'The Birth of a Nation' was accidental – so it's unhelpful to ignore the reasons for his choices, however unpleasant

surrounding the film's release in their local areas, sending recruiters to wait outside the cinema.

McEwan ends on a hopeful note, contrasting the private screening of *The Birth of a Nation* in Wilson's White House with the Obamas watching Steven Spielberg's *Lincoln* (2012) under the same roof. It would be churlish to deny the potency of that image, but while race relations in the States are so brutally fractious, and the Confederate flag itself is still so violently contested, it is more important than ever that we can look back at this myth of the Reconstruction both critically and with understanding. 

THE MAGIC SCREEN

A History of Regent Street Cinema

Edited by Elaine Penn, University of Westminster, 192pp, £20, ISBN 9780957612464

Reviewed by Henry K. Miller

In February 1896 Marlborough Hall, inside the Regent Street Polytechnic, became the site of the first demonstration in Britain of the Lumière Cinématographe. Almost 120 years later the same space, within a much-changed building with an oft-changed name, is back in business as a (mostly) repertory venue, branded "the birthplace of British cinema". This excellent book demonstrates that its claims to attention extend in both directions from that epochal occasion in the last years of Queen Victoria, forward into more recent times, and further back into the past.

Ro Spankie's chapter on the structure's three lives as a theatre, hall and cinema is one of the most intellectually stimulating things I have read all year, situating the Polytechnic within numerous intersecting histories in which '1896' contracts in significance next to other markers. Opened in 1838, the Royal Polytechnic Institution (as it was called in its heyday) was at the forefront of the development of photography and associated optical technologies, and was home to the first photographic studio in Europe

from 1841. Almost five decades before 1896 it had a theatre dedicated to 'optical exhibitions', including magic-lantern shows. The sense of continuity is brought out with conviction.

Equally fascinatingly, Spankie embeds the Polytechnic within the history of the West End, in which the completion of John Nash's Regent



Marlborough Hall inside Regent St Polytechnic

A history of the cinema in the guise of a history of a cinema, this is an exemplary publication, superbly illustrated in full colour

Street in 1825, dividing commercial Soho from the upper-class residential districts to the west, was a major event. She presents the street itself as an 'urban theatre' in which all the world's goods were on display, and from which – through the Polytechnic and similar institutions like the Cosmorama – all the world became visible.

Alongside these specific merits, Spankie's chapter substantiates in new ways two established themes from the historiography of early cinema: first, the relative importance of 'bricolage' over pure invention; second, the sometimes nonlinear nature of progress. As an example of the latter, Spankie shows that the auditorium more closely resembled the cinema of the future in 1848 than it did in 1896, by which time the tiered seating had been levelled and the projection room removed.

As she says, "By virtue of being the first it would never be typical," and partly because of the character of its parent body – which cheerfully straddled education and entertainment – it did not follow the trend towards American fiction features that began in the 1910s. Up until World War II the Polytechnic Cinema specialised in nonfiction films; afterwards, the Cameo Poly was the first-run venue for such masterpieces as *Last Year at Marienbad* (1961), *Leclisse* (1962) and *8½* (1963). A history of the cinema in the guise of a history of a cinema, this is an exemplary publication, superbly illustrated in full colour. 

Read

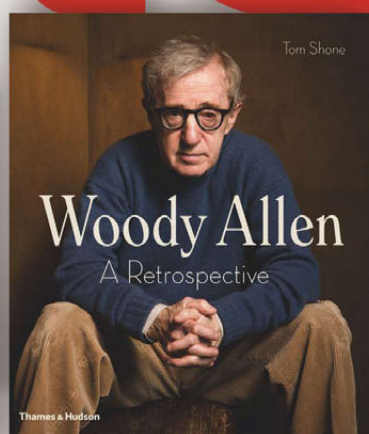


POLITICAL ANIMALS

The New Feminist Cinema

By Sophie Mayer, I.B. Tauris, 272pp, paperback, illustrated, £16.99, ISBN 9781784533724

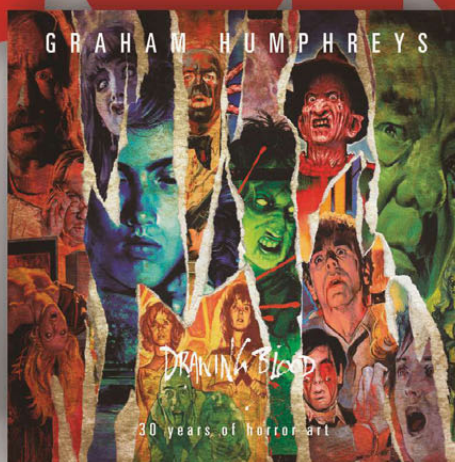
Female filmmakers are hitting the headlines. The last five years have witnessed: the first Best Director Academy Award won by a woman; women filmmakers emerging from places such as Iran, South Korea and Kenya; the first stirrings of a 'trans cinema'; and Pussy Riot's documentation of offline activism. *Political Animals* argues that a new wave of courageous and complex feminist cinema is speaking to a new audience hungry for intersectional accounts of women that are missing in the mainstream. It reveals how innovative production and distribution strategies are responding to urgent political situations and tunes in to the transnational, transgenerational conversations that are taking place between filmmakers such as Claire Denis, Barbara Hammer, Haifaa al-Mansour and Clio Barnard. www.ibtauris.com



WOODY ALLEN: A RETROSPECTIVE

By Tom Shone, Thames & Hudson, 288pp, hardback, illustrated, £29.95, ISBN 9780500517987

Woody Allen is a uniquely innovative performer, writer and director with nearly 50 movies to his credit, from cult slapstick films and romantic comedies to character studies and crime thrillers. Classics such as *Annie Hall*, *Manhattan* and *Hannah and Her Sisters* still resonate, and more recently *Midnight in Paris* and *Blue Jasmine* have been notable successes. In this timely retrospective, Tom Shone reviews Allen's entire career with the help of comments contributed by Allen himself. Superbly illustrated with 250 images, this is a fitting tribute to one of the masters of modern cinema, published to mark Woody Allen's 80th birthday. <http://amzn.to/1NHOAuf>



DRAWING BLOOD

30 Years Of Horror Art

By Graham Humphreys, Proud Publishing, 288pp, hardback, illustrated, £150, ISBN 9780993349805

From *The Evil Dead* to *Island of Death*, Graham Humphreys's *Drawing Blood – 30 Years of Horror Art* features more than 130 painted illustrations. This hardback, luxury edition of 500 includes a slipcase and unique signed print. From film posters and book covers to Blu-ray sleeves, this book is a visual document of Graham's contribution to the British horror scene, and includes text from Mark Gatiss, Kim Newman, Sam Raimi and Richard Stanley. Exclusive to Proud Publishing, pre-orders from www.proud.co.uk – or phone 020 7349 0822. The publication, due this October, will be supported by an exhibition at the Proud Gallery in Camden, London. www.proud.co.uk



BRITISH TRASH CINEMA

By I.Q. Hunter, BFI/Palgrave, 232pp, paperback, £19.99, ISBN 9781844574155

British Trash Cinema is the first overview of the wilder shores of British exploitation and cult paracinema from the 1950s onwards. From obscure horror, science fiction and sexploitation, to arthouse camp, Hammer's prehistoric fantasies and the worst British films ever made, author I.Q. Hunter draws on rare archival material and new primary research to take us through the weird and wonderful world of British trash cinema.

Beginning by outlining the definitions of trash films and their place in British film history, Hunter explores topics including Hammer's overlooked fantasy films, the emergence of the sexploitation film, Ken Russell's high camp gothic, gross-out comedies and contemporary straight-to-DVD horror and erotica. www.palgrave.com/page/bfi-publishing/

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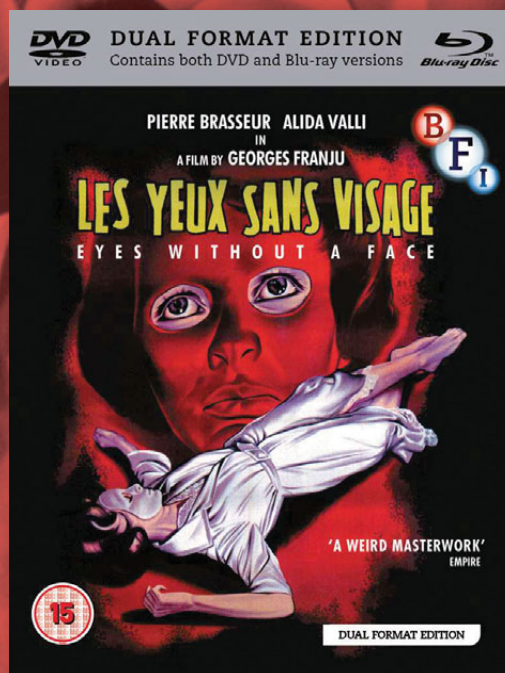
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DISTRIBUTIVE JUSTICE

In your review of *The Reunion* (S&S, August), the question of how "such drivel gets distribution" is posed. Readers may have found the answer on page 23, in an advert that highlights how, as part of a pan-European project called Scope 50, the film was chosen for distribution out of a shortlisted ten by film lovers who applied to get involved in the acquisition, selection and promotion of a new European film. Further information can be found at scope50.co.uk

Edward Fletcher Soda Pictures, London

TRASHED REPUTATIONS

Early in my article on American trash cinema ('Total trash', S&S, September), a sentence reads: "Likewise, such films should star actors unlikely to be found anywhere else, least of all in respectable movies – people like Boris Lugosi, Thomas Sweetwood and Uta Erickson."

Readers should be aware that this sentence, as it appeared in my original manuscript, named "Boris Lugosi, Thomas Sweetwood and Artemidia Grillet" – the latter an amusingly bookish pseudonym that Uta Erickson used on some of her trashier films, including Michael Findlay's *A Thousand Pleasures* (discussed in the article). Indeed, all three of the names I mentioned were trash cinema pseudonyms ('Boris Lugosi' was Salvatore Baccaro, 'Thomas Sweetwood' was William Kerwin), but one of your sub-editors seems to have missed the tongue-in-cheek point I was making.

I find the 'correction' doubly unfortunate. First of all, Uta Erickson almost never worked under her own name – the IMDb lists 20 aliases for her! – so to mention it makes it seem a more personal criticism than the other two. More to the point, I would never have been so unchivalrous as to suggest that the real actors behind these elected personas were unworthy or incapable of respectable work.

Tim Lucas by email

FRENCH KISS

I thank Philip French for his excellent review of the book *The Lives of Robert Ryan* ('Ups, downs and disappointments', S&S, July). As Martin Scorsese said, "Ryan was one of the greatest actors in the history of the American Cinema," but also one of the most underrated. I noticed one error: Ryan was 63 when he died in 1973, not 74.

Roy Mills Essex

BURIED TREASURE

While I am happy that niche films are regularly unearthed and reviewed in your Home Cinema section, I am thoroughly disheartened that there are

The Reunion



LETTER OF THE MONTH MIGHTY APHRODITES



I.Q. Hunter ('The road to excess', S&S, September) refers somewhat dismissively to "a sex film, *Young Aphrodites* (1963)" being screened by Antony Balch in 1968 in a triple bill with *Häxan: Witchcraft Through the Ages* and *Un chien andalou*, presumably because he has not heard of the film and hasn't taken the trouble to discover anything about it.

For the record, in 1963 *Young Aphrodites* won the Silver Bear at Berlin for the Greek

director Nikos Koundouros, and also the International Federation of Film Critics (FIPRESCI) prize. Set in Ancient Greece, the film is actually about an encounter between a nomadic group of shepherds and the women of a fishing village, focusing on the friendship between two children and a love affair between two young adults.

If only there were cinemas screening such triple-bills today!

David Howell Ilkley

films that by any measure should have been long available to a more general audience, yet which remain stubbornly buried, or available only as American imports or on video cassette from online sales outlets.

Many of these films are prize-winning or Oscar-nominated.

Noteworthy examples are the Paul Newman-directed *Rachel, Rachel* (1968), with a wonderful performance from the ever-excellent Joanne Woodward; the Cannes winner *Yol* (1982); the acting masterclass that is Sidney Lumet's *Long Day's Journey into Night* (1962); *The Pawnbroker* (1964), also directed by Lumet, which features Rod Steiger's own favourite performance (I saw it reviewed here some time ago, but attempts to track down a copy have proved

futile). Most depressingly, a few years ago, I went to a BFI screening of a brand new print of the haunting Egyptian drama *The Night of Counting the Years* (1970) under the aegis of Martin Scorsese. I was excited, because a newly struck print often presages a DVD release; but no such release has been forthcoming.

These are only a few highly rated films by notable artists. Is there any reason for their continued non-appearance? Are there copyright issues? If not, why is no distribution company giving us the opportunity to experience again a back catalogue of established worth?

Tony Bennett London

Additions and corrections

September p.66 *The Wolfpack*, Certificate 15, 89m 37s; p.68 *Buttercup Bill*, Theatrical certificate: 18, 95m 31s; p.69 *Cartel Land*, Certificate 15, 100m 23s; p.74 52 *Tuesdays* In our review of Sophie Hyde's film, the reviewer incorrectly stated that the actor Del Herbert-Jane was undergoing hormone-replacement therapy. p.78 *Hard to Be a God*, Certificate 18, 177m 13s; p.83 *North v South*, Certificate 18, 96m 26s; p.84 *Paper Towns*, Certificate 12A, 108m 58s; p.85 *President*, Certificate 15, 118m 51s; p.87 *The Second Mother*, Certificate 15, 111m 46s; p.91 *Theeb*, Certificate 15, 100m 29s; p.92 *Trainwreck*, Certificate 15, 124m 39s
August p.69 *Cub*, Not submitted for theatrical classification, Video certificate: 18, Running time: 82m 44s; p.92 *Zarafa*, Certificate PG 78m 40s

ENDINGS...

PICNIC



Daring in its time, Joshua Logan's *Picnic* might look flawed and a little dated to modern viewers – but its perfect closing shot survives

By Andrew Bienen

Middle of the decade, middle of the country. 6 June 1955. The legendary cinematographer Haskell Wexler, who at the time was a young, uncredited camera operator, boarded a helicopter with a CinemaScope camera and was flown out over the farmland surrounding the town of Nickerson, Kansas, to make one of the more audacious and optimistic final shots in American film. The movie was *Picnic*, from the play by William Inge, directed by Joshua Logan. It's the story of Madge (Kim Novak), a beautiful small-town girl who, on the day and night of the town's Labor Day picnic, falls in love with a drifter named Hal (William Holden), and forsakes her wealthy fiancé and the secure life planned by her mother to run away with him.

Picnic was a popular and critical success, nominated for six Academy Awards including Best Picture and Best Director. Marketed as a daring account of sexual passion ("From the moment he hit town... she knew it was just a matter of time"), the film was praised for its evocation of small-town lives. But the years have been unkind to the film's reputation. Roger Ebert wrote, "It's hard to believe *Picnic* was considered hot stuff in 1955. Clunky and awkward... it's a movie to show how attitudes have changed." David Thomson, who prizes the film, says that some of it is "not too far from shameful rot", while Michael Wood notes how hindsight has permanently

altered our view and how the film almost tilts "into uncontrollable melodrama".

Can a film be flawed and 'dated' but still have a perfect ending? *Picnic* suggests the answer is yes. It's instructive to consider *Picnic*'s flaws in terms of unresolved tensions in the film's style. Logan, a theatre director, had staged *Picnic* on Broadway. Working in film for the first time, he remained loyal to the play's use of symbols. In a key scene, Hal's shirt gets accidentally torn by Rosemary, a drunken schoolteacher who tries to seduce him on the dance floor. What might have worked in a stylised stage setting does not work on film. The tearing shirt, the crashing music on the soundtrack, the confused faces of the characters in the aftermath, are probably impossible for a modern audience to watch without laughing. Even in the 50s, some critics found it forced. Eric Bentley said Inge was at his weakest when he relied on symbols, and that in this scene Inge had merely brought out "the torn shirt of Stanley Kowalski".

But there is much more than this in *Picnic*. Logan insisted upon shooting on location. In so doing, he opened up the film to the physical landscape of a real Kansas town and found ways of articulating the inner lives of Inge's characters that make symbolism unnecessary. A haunting night shot of the house where the schoolteacher lives tells us everything we need to know about her loneliness. An image of Madge behind a screen door is a perfect expression of longing. The film is brimming with images like these.

It's a transcendent moment, yet it's made from the most ordinary materials: a freight train to Tulsa, a Trailways bus

The ending of the film was worked out in Kansas. The early drafts of Daniel Taradash's screenplay end after Hal leaves town on a freight train. Madge confers with her kid sister Millie (Susan Strasberg) and makes the risky decision to follow Hal. She says goodbye to her mother and her kindly neighbour and walks to the bus stop. We hear a train whistle, a bird chirping in the trees. 'The End'. A note from the studio said: "Let's have a better ending with Madge. Not the birds and the trees... I don't feel as if we've found the right visual finish for the film." Three days before shooting began, in the revised final draft, they got it right. Logan claimed it was his idea, although it's hard to imagine that director of photography James Wong Howe didn't contribute something.

Madge says goodbye to Millie and boards a Continental Trailways bus. As Madge rides out of town we see the backyards on her street, Millie running through them, waving goodbye, and Madge's mother and neighbour also moving through the yards, waving.

Then the helicopter shot begins: an aerial view of Madge's bus moving west. The camera rises up and soars away, leaving the bus behind, passing over farms and fields. At last, on the right-hand edge of the frame, the camera glimpses a line of railroad tracks and, a moment later, the freight train that Hal is riding. The camera moves until the train is centered in the frame; then the image fades out. In its breathtaking choreography of bus, train and moving camera, the shot is a triumphant affirmation of Madge's decision to follow Hal. It's a transcendent moment, yet it's made from the most ordinary materials: a freight train to Tulsa, a Trailways bus. To find such transcendence in the ordinary is one of the glories of cinema. It's what Inge always sought to capture in his writing, and why *Picnic* still lives. 



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